

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

SCIENCE FICTION BY TOP WRITERS

FEATURING
**THE WINDS SHINE
AT NIGHT**

by Sam Merwin Jr.

NAKED EYE
by Thomas Bell

SPRING 25c

A
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C



A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

WALTER PAUL



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STORIES

VOL. XLIII, NO. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION SPRING ISSUE

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in the ring...
a coward when it
came to women

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

ONE of the more annoying things about professional cynics is the fact that they are so often right. A certain pessimism about human nature seems enough justified so that confirmed believers in the essential goodness of human nature have a hard time keeping ahead of the newspaper headlines.

The cynics, always forecasting humanity's dramatic self-obliteration, have seized with joy upon the atom bomb and its derivatives as a gratifyingly dramatic modus for mankind's exit from the scheme of things. In the meantime they have overlooked the fact that while the big preparations for blowing things up are going on, in a quiet corner of the stage an equally insidious sub-plot is being worked out.

Curious Patterns

A. Dr. Biskind, of Westport, Connecticut, reports in the *American Journal of Digestive Diseases* that mankind is rapidly poisoning itself with DDT and its related chemicals. Since 1945, when DDT came into general use, says the doctor, there have been a series of curious patterns in "the incidence of certain ailments and the development of new syndromes. A most significant feature of this situation is that both man and all his domestic animals have simultaneously been affected."

The doctor is not backward about naming the disease either. For man, those which seem to have become more virulent or more common are disorders of the liver, polio, disturbances of the heart and arteries, gastro-intestinal trouble, cancer, several varieties of pneumonia, plus a sort of blanket fatigue and muscular weakness on top of neuropsychiatric symptoms. All of which sounds like those well-known run-down symptoms for which radio and tv announcers are always prescribing.

Man's domestic animals, usually free of cardiac difficulties, have their own troubles with a

mysterious malady known as "X" which attacks cattle; more and more hoof and mouth disease; vesicular Exanthemata in pigs; "blue-tongue" in sheep, plus "scrapie" and something called the "over-eating disease"; "Newcastle" disease in chickens and "Hard Pad" disease in dogs.

All but hoof and mouth disease, Dr. Biskind points out, are so new that they do not even appear in the 1942 issue of "Keeping Livestock Healthy," the Department of Agriculture's handbook.

To the medical sleuth this appears like more than coincidence. Not only Dr. Biskind, but also other researchers have theorized that something new and unpleasant has been added to man's environment which is playing hob. DDT has shown up in milk and in the fat of beef animals. Early tests had rated it as dangerous and there were impressive warnings against its use, in spite of which it was sprayed freely around dairy barns, in homes and even used as a spray or dip on livestock for killing ticks and lice. It is used on lakes and ponds to kill mosquitoes, thereby also killing fish. It is sprayed over orchards, killing not only harmful insects, but also valuable bees and birds.

"It is not generally realized," says Dr. Biskind gloomily, "how vast are the quantities of the new poisons spread over the countryside . . . contamination of food is virtually universal."

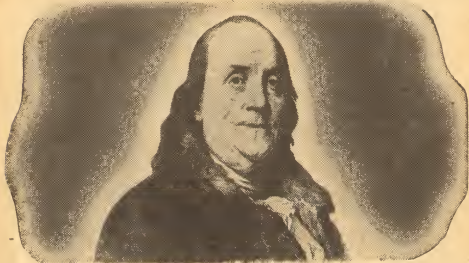
Humans Are Adaptable

This attractive picture gives us a dandy alternative. We don't have to wait to be blown up by H-bombs. We can poison ourselves—or develop a tolerance to DDT. The human frame is notoriously hardy and does adapt to all kinds of hostile environments.

People who can cope with such menaces as television, subways, night clubs, traffic jams and be-bop should be able to take DDT in their

(Continued on page 123)

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

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The Winds Shine



*It's a risky thing when a man turns back to
his family tree . . . and finds himself out on a limb. . . .*

at Night

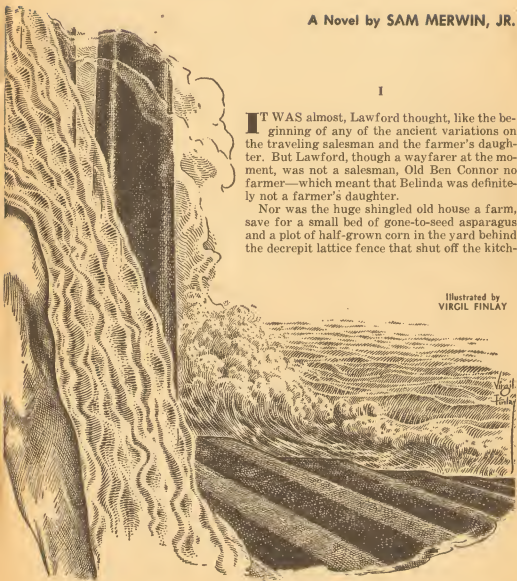
A Novel by SAM MERWIN, JR.

I

IT WAS almost, Lawford thought, like the beginning of any of the ancient variations on the traveling salesman and the farmer's daughter. But Lawford, though a wayfarer at the moment, was not a salesman, Old Ben Connor no farmer—which meant that Belinda was definitely not a farmer's daughter.

Nor was the huge shingled old house a farm, save for a small bed of gone-to-seed asparagus and a plot of half-grown corn in the yard behind the decrepit lattice fence that shut off the kitch-

Illustrated by
VIRGIL FINLAY



en area from what had once been the formal gardens.

Twenty-eight rooms, Lawford thought, his memory prodded by sight of the decaying summer mansion—twenty-eight rooms, including a conservatory, a ball-room, two dining-rooms, a billiard room, a library, nine master's bedrooms, a whole wing devoted to servants' quarters—and not counting seven baths. Twenty-eight rooms looking just as he had last seen them, and yet curiously different.

A turreted Reign-of-Terror monstrosity, the ragged old mansion stood defiantly on the rim of the ocean, flanked by dozens of other architectural dinosaurs, dating back fifty to seventy-five years. The ever-hungry-waters of the Atlantic had long since eaten away the once-trim front lawns that had sloped gently down to white pergolaed jetties extending into the water.

The beach had moved inland to end in a bluff directly against the foundations of the old house, allowing areas of mortared stone and half-rotted timber to protrude. The glass roof of the conservatory was largely open to the sky, lawn and formal gardens long since run to weedy profusion.

And I own this old wreck, Lawford thought, *it's all I have left in the world.*

"I wish you'd let us know you were coming," said Old Ben Connor with mild resentment. "We'd have tried to fix it up for you." He sighed, added, "It ain't easy, Mister Martin, trying to keep it up with only Linda and me on the premises."

Martin Lawford thought that Old Ben was really old. The back-strong chauffeur-gardener he remembered from his own childhood and youth now looked, where his extremities protruded from faded khaki shirt and trousers, like a turkey's neck—all scales and wattles. He said, "How is Belinda? I'd almost forgotten her."

"All right, I guess." Old Ben looked surprised that Lawford should have asked. Evidently he didn't realize how

long it had been since Martin or any other member of the family had set foot in the old summer place.

"I suppose she's made you a grandfather by now," said Lawford.

"Not so's you'd notice it," replied Old Ben. "Not Linda."

There was uncomfortable silence and Belinda appeared then. Martin barely repressed surprise. From her father's remark he had expected a rough-hewn servant-class maiden, condemned to spinsterhood or occasional hired-man adventures by her homeliness and vulgarity.

In fifteen years Belinda Connor had grown up. That was to be expected, of course. Connor, now thirty-one, had not been back for fourteen years. When he left she had been a freckled pigtailed nose-peeled scrawny brat of eleven, proudly sporting a ridiculous two-piece bathing suit whose upper portion she needed not at all.

Now, at twenty-five, she filled a polka-dotted tie-around shirtwaist to perfection. Her legs, revealed by neatly pressed white piqué shorts, were long and slim and straight and honey gold in color, as was the rest of the visible her. Short bronze hair, shot with gold by exposure to the sun, framed closely a no longer freckled face—an alert arrogant face whose contours and expression would not have been out of place on the cover of any of the magazines devoted to high fashion.

She looked at Lawford briefly, brazenly, then said in soft casual accents, "You've kept your hair."

"And you've cut yours off." Lawford's answer was in the nature of a last ditch counter-attack. That any such girl should live here in the run-down old Shoreside summer mansion, that any such girl should be Old Ben Connor's daughter, verged on the reverse-bathetic.

"Mister Martin plans to stay a while," said Old Ben.

A cool curved eyebrow, darker than the gold-bronze hair above it, rose frac-

tionally. Then Belinda Connor said, "I'll fix up the north tower room. The plumbing works and the roof doesn't leak."

She turned and was gone, leaving a vacuum behind her.

OLD BEN rose laboriously from the spring-shot old fashioned rocker armchair in which he was sitting and slouched across the worn carpet to a medium-sized television set that stood anachronistically between a pair of tall ormolu-and-enamel vases from which rusty palms sprouted untidily.

"Time for the roller derby," said Old

Connor, like a fresh orchid in a rubbish pile.

The simile, he decided, was as corny as his own thoughts, which were inavoidably beginning to pile up where Belinda was concerned. Undoubtedly such a girl was thoroughly tangled in complications of her own choosing. Nor was he, in his present deflated financial condition, a proper playmate for such a girl.

Yet she was Old Ben's daughter. Before Lawford's father died, in 1944, he had made a condition forbidding sale of the old summer mansion and permitting Ben residence as long as he chose to re-

----- Gateway to Another Time -----

THE best science fiction strikes out boldly in new directions, but keeps one foot, as it were, on familiar soil. For the imagination is most stimulated, it seems, when it can extend familiar concepts into newer forms. Without the anchor in known elements it tends to founder. So imagination, like the people in Merwin's fast-moving story, descends familiar stairs in its own basement and steps through into another world, another time.

Here is the world these people and their descendants made—and didn't like when it was done. You'll be glad you still have a chance to make it something different.

—The Editor

Ben, adjusting the dials and antenna. "Like those girls! They really bang into each other." He chuckled—a low senile chuckle—returned to his chair.

"Mrs. Connor . . . ?" Lawford asked hesitantly.

"She's gone," said Old Ben equivocally. "Been gone more'n a dozen years." He pulled out an old drop-stem pipe and filled and lit it, never taking his eyes from the screen.

Lawford had hoped to recapture something of lost summers, secure sun-washed, surfswimming, dancing, tennis-playing summers, before war and family deaths and business disappointments had eroded his life. He had found nothing but more erosion awaiting him at Shoreside—and now here was Belinda

main as caretaker. All very much in the old-style family tradition. But for this clause Lawford would long since have sold the place.

"Look at that! Four of 'em down!" said Old Ben enthusiastically as a jam developed into near-mayhem on the television screen. He sighed, added, "I'd give a lot to see 'em in the flesh."

"Perhaps it could be arranged," said Lawford.

"I'd sure appreciate it," said Old Ben. "But someone's got to keep the sea-gate working or the house will fall into the ocean—like the Tewkesbury place did last year during the hurricane."

"Good Lord!" said Lawford, feeling a nostalgic pang at thought of one of Shoreside's biggest summer palaces dy-

ing in such fashion. "Why didn't somebody build a breakwater to protect it?"

Old Ben shrugged. "Nobody wanted to spend the money," he said. "Pretty soon all these places will go." He paused, shook his head, added, "Don't look like many folks'll miss 'em when they do."

"What's this sea-gate you mentioned?" Lawford asked. The women's shift on the roller derby had come to an end and their male teammates were racing around the screen, more expertly if less provocatively. Old Ben's attention wandered from the set.

"You mean to say you . . . ?" Old Ben began. Then, nodding, "That's right, we rigged it up after your time here, Mister Martin. It ain't exactly a sea-gate. But the foundations of this house is built deep and they'd fill up with water if we didn't keep the gate shut at high tide. Wouldn't take long for the water to undermine 'em. They leaks a little, of course, so we open it up to let what water comes in get out at low tide."

"I'd like to see it," said Lawford without any real interest.

"Glad to show it to you whenever you say," said Old Ben. "Better not go down there alone. A body can get drowned. Besides—"

Whatever he had been about to add remained unsaid. Belinda reappeared in the doorway, saying, "The room's ready, Martin, if you want to bring your things up. You remember where it is?"

"I think so," said Lawford. He was a little startled at her ready if casual use of his first name. To Belinda he was not the master, he was an equal—or was he held inferior? Rising and moving toward the immense waste-space front hall to pick up his two bags, Lawford wondered. He smelled a faint aura of pleasant perfume when he passed Belinda in the doorway, repressed a powerful impulse to touch that firm golden flesh.

As he picked up his bags and started up the big staircase with its shabby carpeting he heard her say, "Pa, what have I told you about talking to anyone about . . ."

Her voice faded as she moved into the living room and he could hear no more of what she had told her father.

UPSTAIRS the house, with its dim corridors and friendly oaken doors and wainscoting, seemed to wrap itself about him like an old and warming comforter on a chill winter night. He found the north tower room, with its three-windowed bay and put down his bags and inhaled the familiar pleasant smell of ocean-damp paint. He looked at the big brass double-bed with its patchwork spread and the sepia Landseer print of "The Stag at Bay" on the flowered-paper wall and the white wicker two-deck table with its nacreous conch-shell ashtray.

Everything was just as it had been in his memory, except for the ugly naked plastic electric fixture that replaced the ornate metal and glass arrangements of the old gas-lit past.

He opened the windows wider still and looked out over the verandah roof and the quiet slick roll of the ocean at peace in the late afternoon sunlight. He could just see the strip of white beach, turning to deeper blue toward the water's edge, and for the moment the illusion of a past reclaimed was complete. From where he stood he could see none of the erosion that had made Shoreside a ghost resort.

He unpacked his bags and put his shirts and underwear neatly away in the bureau drawers, hung up his two suits and slacks and robe and sports jackets in the closet. He emptied his pockets on the white wicker table.

Two thousand dollars in traveler's checks, less than three hundred dollars in cash. That was what his partner had left him—that and a Navy disability pension and this house he couldn't sell. And, of course, the little MG that had carried him here. Not much out of the fortune he had inherited during the war. He reminded himself to inform the Navy Department where he was, if he decided to stay here a while, so his check would

keep coming every month.

Funny, he had never considered living on a pension before.

He felt grimy and thought of a bath. Then, looking out at the water, decided a swim would be better. He took off his clothes and dug swimming trunks out of the bureau, where he had just put them away—like an idiot, he thought.

Changing into the trunks, he bumped a bare toe against the foot of the brass bedstead. It hurt, but not so much as he expected. He grabbed a bedpost, ran his hands up and down its cylindrical smoothness. It wasn't brass but wood painted to look like brass.

Then he saw motion on the beach and moved to the window. Belinda Connor had gone for a dip. In brief light-blue trunks and halter she was breathtakingly lovely.

He moved toward the door, intending to join her in the clear light green water. Then, hand on the knob, he hesitated. There was something about this girl that suggested he tread warily with her. He decided to wait until she had finished, so he smoked a cigarette and watched her swim cleanly out a couple of hundred yards, then tread water briefly, then come lazily in, letting the gentle surf do most of the work.

When he got down to the beach she had vanished. The water refreshed him, washed the highway grit from his pores—but it was lonesome water for all of its tonic effect. Lawford went back into the house and toweled off in the north tower room and got into slacks and a sport shirt and a light jacket. Then he sat with Old Ben and watched the news and Perry Como's summer replacement on the television screen until Belinda announced that dinner was ready.

She didn't call it supper, he noticed. Nor did she make any apology about not having had warning that he was coming. No apology was needed for the meal she served.

Table talk was not part of the Connor cultural scheme. Old Ben laced into his schnitzel Holstein and tomatoes in

okra as if he had not eaten in a week.

"When're you gonna have Swiss steak?" he asked. At her shrug he said, "I like food that sticks to a man's ribs, not so much fancy stuff. Well, time for Happy Felton." He departed.

BELINDA made no apology for his bad manners, which was another point in her favor. Or perhaps she simply didn't care enough about Lawford's reaction to bother explaining. He couldn't decide. He offered her a cigarette, which she accepted.

She said, "What brought you back here like this, Martin?"

He hesitated—he still wasn't used to her calling him by his first name. Then he said, "Flight." She was making him cryptic too—perhaps because he felt she understood without many words.

She blew a plume of white smoke toward the dingy deep ceiling and said, "There's nothing here—not anymore."

"Then why do you stay?" he asked her, his curiosity getting the better of him.

He noticed for the first time that her eyes were green. They regarded him in cool slanting appraisal for a long moment. Then she said, "It's been my home for always. And there's Pa. And perhaps I like it. I don't care much for the city."

"I should think New York would care for you," he told her.

"Perhaps." She didn't seem interested. "You have to do things in the city or it does things to you. I don't care much for it." She paused again, added, "I don't mind if you swim with me tomorrow."

"Thanks," he said drily. This, he thought, was getting a little out of hand. This—not a farmer's but a—caretaker's daughter was making him feel like a barely-suffered visitor in his own house. Or perhaps that was how she saw it.

He looked upward, said, "What's happened to the old gas chandelier—and all the other iron fittings?"

For some reason his question seemed

to ruffle her. The smooth low forehead wrinkled ever so slightly, the green eyes flashed for an instant, the full lips tightened momentarily. She said, "They were rusting away so we—got rid of them."

She sounded on the defensive. He wondered why; the question had been an idle one. He didn't really give a damn what had happened to the old eyesores. She got up, the half-smoked cigarette between her lips, eyes half closed to keep smoke out of her eyes. She began to pick up the dishes. Half consciously he wondered why the silver made so little clatter as she stacked it on the plates. Then he realized they had been eating with plastic tableware—decorative but still plastic. He didn't suppose his parents had left any good silverware in the old house. And the bedstead that was no longer in use. . . .

He looked at the doorplate—the door-knob was glass. The plate looked like metal but he would have laid odds just then that it was not. For some reason he shivered though the night was warm. Then he told himself he was acting like an old and not very attractive woman. He got into bed and began to read. The book was a portable Plutarch and carefully calculated to put him to sleep. It did.

He felt frightened upon awakening in the morning. Not at the sunlight that streamed through the tall east window of the big bay or at the quiet rhythmic slosh of small waves on the beach beyond it. He had the feeling of being in a totally empty house.

Breakfast awaited him in a row of transparent plastic casseroles on the sideboard. He found a note, written in a clear half-printed young-woman script, suggesting how to heat whatever he wanted. He called for Old Ben but got no answer.

He decided he might as well make the best of it. After all, he had landed on the Connors without invitation or warning. He heated a thick slice of ham in a glass chafing dish, warmed up an English muffin, settled for milk from the

refrigerator in the kitchen in lieu of coffee.

II

IT WAS after ten o'clock when he finished and the tide was still low. The water didn't look especially inviting. Lawford walked around the house until pebbles made his espadrilles uncomfortable. He got into the MG and drove about the dead resort and marveled a little at the completeness of its fall from Edwardian grandeur.

Even in his childhood some of the older residents had maintained costly horses and coachmen and smart lacquered carriages to ride out in. Rolls Royces and Mercedeses had been as common as more domestic Duesenbergs and Pierce Arrows. Now the few cars he saw were of the ugly inverted-bathtub postwar stock-car variety he had come to loathe.

All in all it was a depressing experience. He paused, on his way back, at the bar-restaurant that had replaced the spic-and-span white Bath and Tennis Club. It was dirty and well equipped with unemptied spittoons. Flypaper spirals, spotted with insect corpses, dangled from the ceiling like festoons for some ghastly carnival. It smelled of stale liquor and sweat and pungent lye cleansers.

He had himself a beer and got out quickly and returned to the big house, half-minded to pack up and try his luck elsewhere. Somehow it had got to be early afternoon. Old Ben was back. He wanted to know if Lawford had found his breakfast all right, then added, "Linda was looking for you. She said somethin' about going swimming. She'll be back soon."

"I'll wait on the beach," said Lawford, his desire to leave quickly superimposed by renewed interest in the misplaced girl. The sun was still high and he could begin to get a burn, he decided.

"Linda's a nice girl but she's got some odd ideas, Mister Martin," said Old Ben.

"She's a very attractive young woman," Lawford replied.

"She's a looker, all right—don't know who she took after," said the old man. "She's a lot better lookin' than her ma ever was. But she's got her own ways."

"So I've noticed," Lawford told him. "I shan't bother her."

Old Ben regarded him searchingly for a long moment, then turned and walked toward the living room. "Saturday," he said. "The roller derby comes on for two whole hours. Don't wanna miss it."

Lawford changed to his half-dry swimming trunks, took a dip, then walked along the beach. The tide was still going out. He eyed unhappily the dangerous condition of most of the old gingerbread mansions that were being undercut by the bluff. As Old Ben had said, the Tewkesbury house, once the most turreted of them all, had gone like a pulled tooth. Its absence made him a little blue, a little insecure. He turned to walk back to his own house.

Belinda, a mid-distance doll in two-piece pink lastex suit, waved at him. Unexpectedly she seemed to welcome him like an old friend when they met. She said, "I'm sorry about this morning but I had to go away for a while. Did you manage all right?"

"It was okay—the ham was fine," he said. They walked back along the hard-packed tidal sand, almost touching. He was again extremely conscious of her smooth golden skin.

He said, "This is none of my business but why in hell aren't you married?"

Again an eyebrow rose, again green eyes flashed at him obliquely. She said drily, "I gather you haven't seen the local crop of swains." Then, casually, "Besides, I have my own interests."

"And I," he lamented, "used to have a certain apparently unjustified pride in my own sex. But if no one has claimed you. . . ."

She laughed and the joyousness of her laugh was a denial of her recent blasé lack of interest. She eyed him again and said, "You're very nice, you know, Mar-

tin. I'm sorry some girl has given you a bad time." Then, without warning, she put firm hands on his shoulders and pulled him around to face her and kissed him on the lips—she could do it without standing on tiptoe. Then, with another laugh, she was splashing into the water.

MARTIN gave up pursuit, panting, after a hundred yards. She was a much better swimmer. He returned regretfully to the sand, watched her sport like a porpoise, then ride a breaking wave almost to his feet. He pulled her upright, said, "You're not supposed to make the chase *that* tough."

She eyed him, unabashed, told him matter-of-factly, "In a month you'll be catching me. You're just out of condition."

"For that I have to wait a month?" he asked. He moved toward her but she shook sand and water out of her water-dark hair into his face. He decided he was going to have to let her do the leading—at least for a while.

She said, "Time passes quickly," but offered him no further invitation. Then she added, "If you're going to ask me for a date I'd love to but not tonight. I'm already booked up."

Again her cool assurance stopped him in his tracks. He knew he ought to be angry, but it was like being angry at the ocean—or a perfect Greek statue. He said, "You give me the sign then, my sweet—and you're right. I *was* going to ask you for a date. Imagine—at my age!"

"You're not so old, Martin." She was all friendly camaraderie again. "You used to be a good tennis player, didn't you?"

"Just fair—good enough for college teams and the average country-club final," he told her honestly. "I liked playing well a lot better than fighting to win."

"You're not competitive—I'm glad." She ran strong slender hands through her short hair. "I think it's stupid, even self destructive. You'll notice most real-

ly competitive men die young."

"Most non-competitive men live broke," he replied.

She was undisturbed, said, "You only have to know a trick or two the others don't. Here we are." She flopped to the sand in front of the exposed foundations of the old mansion. He lay down on his stomach, his head close to hers, but she rested her face on her forearms and appeared to go to sleep. Lawford did the same and snoozed under the sun until she woke him up. "I've got to get dinner," she said. "I'm going out right afterward."

Lawford did not enjoy the meal, although he took a couple of slugs of eighteen-year-old scotch in his room before going downstairs to eat. Nor was it the meal's fault. It had something to do with Belinda. From the mocking yet sympathetic gleam in her green eyes he could see that she knew she had him hooked. He cursed silently, wondering which of the scorned local louts was going to have the privilege of mauling that beautiful body and seeking to humble that arrogant pride in the front seat of one of the vulgar inverted-bathtub stock models he so detested.

He made his way into one of the west bedrooms, which smelled of damp and disuse, to a window vantage whence he could overlook all approaches to the big house from the road. He saw Belinda appear behind the kitchen area lattice, to dump garbage in a sunken pit. So at least she had not already gone on her date—at least he would get a chance to see who her partner was.

No car entered the driveway or honked a summons from the road beyond. No gangling youth followed his adenoids toward the house. Nor did he see Belinda emerge again from the old mansion after dumping the garbage. He waited at his point of vantage till it was too dark to see.

He walked down the hall to the south wing, where he knew Belinda lived. No wench, he thought, was going to play such a game with him. His diaphragm

stirred at the prospect of bringing matters to a head. His neck prickled in embarrassment at having allowed his own caretaker's daughter to stall him off in favor of a phantom date.

The door of her room stood open. It had formerly been his mother's room. Lawford had a quick vision of it as it had been years before, awash with satin cushions and frills and French dolls, its dressing table forested with innumerable perfume bottles.

It was as feminine as ever—but with a stark precise modern feminism that made it as much Belinda's as it had once been his mother's. More remarkable it was empty. Across it a bathroom door, lined with a long mirror, stood ajar. The bathroom too was empty.

Puzzled, Lawford prowled the rooms of the upper floor. He went down the back stairs, found kitchen and pantries abandoned. In the living room Old Ben was staring fixedly at a variety show on the television screen. Lawford said, "Where's Belinda?"

"Gone," said Old Ben. "She went right after I opened the sea-gate in the cellar." He never looked away from the screen.

The solution came to him then. Belinda must have met her date on the beach. Lawford went out on the verandah and peered in both directions along its moonswept length. It was empty. The moon was still low above the horizon and the upperworks of a small cruising motor yacht were silhouetted against it. Feminine laughter floated its way across the muted water.

III

LAWFORD drove the MG to the dingy bar on the site of the old Bath Club. The bartender nodded recognition as he came up to ask his bidding. The other inhabitants numbered nine—seven men of varying ages and degrees of drunkenness and two of those bold restless lantern-jawed females that appear simultaneously, the clock around, in places as

disreputable, city or country, from coast to coast.

A plump, red-faced man in dirty white ducks, spotted red turtle-neck sweater and rusty yachting cap, sat on the next stool. He eyed Lawford with the curiosity of the small-community resident for the newcomer. He said, "You're staying at the old Lawford house, ain't you? I saw you drive that toy car of yours in there this afternoon."

"I'm Martin Lawford," he said.

The plump man pushed his yachting cap far back on his forehead. "I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "I shoulda known. I used to know your father—put in all the bathrooms in that house. Hell; I remember you, sporting around with your tennis racquets."

With an effort Lawford recalled the man. He said, "You must be Pete O'Brien. How've you been?"

O'Brien seemed inordinately pleased that Lawford should have recalled his name. He said, "This calls for a drink. Larz!" And, when the bartender had complied, "How you getting along with Old Ben? He's a character, that one. Say—is he still goofed off on the roller derby? Never knew anyone bit with the bug so bad."

"He's still bit," said Lawford, moderately amused and aware that he was going to be thoroughly bored in a matter of minutes.

O'Brien summoned the bartender again. "Hey, Larz," he said, "you still got some of those Annie Oakleys to the roller derby?"

"I wish I could use 'em for swizzle sticks," said Larz. "Then maybe I could get rid of 'em."

"Could I have a couple?" Lawford asked.

"Sure—glad to unload 'em. They're a drug on the market this season." The bartender tossed a couple of strips of pasteboard onto the bar. Lawford thanked him, looked at them, saw they were dated for the night after the morrow. He put them into his wallet, said to O'Brien, "How does it happen Belin-

da hasn't married? I haven't seen anything around here to match her."

"She's a looker." Pete O'Brien echoed Old Ben. Then he added oddly, "Linda's got no time for any of the local boys. She has her own—interests."

"And what might they be?" Lawford inquired.

O'Brien looked at him shrewdly, then shook his head. "Whatever they are they keep her busy," he said. "Better not get ideas about *her*. She's been of her own mind since she was a little girl—even before her mother left."

"What happened to Mrs. Connor anyway?" Lawford asked. He recalled Belinda's mother as a darkly handsome, blue-eyed Irish woman who had seemed always to be laboring under some intense inner pressure.

"A lot of us would jike the answer to that," said O'Brien. "She just left, that's all." He paused, added, "Let's play the machine."

"If you like," said Lawford. "I'm not very lucky." He wanted to ask more questions about Belinda and her mother but the change of subject was too pointed to be ignored. The oddness already oppressing him about the Connor household was confirmed by O'Brien's reactions. He put five quarters in the machine, got eight back, lost three of these, then hit the jackpot. Even after buying drinks for the house his pockets were heavy with silver when he drove home.

Old Ben was pathetically grateful for the tickets when Lawford met him in the hall, en route from the television set to the rear of the house. The former gardener-chauffeur accepted the passes and said, "Thanks, Mister Martin. Sure have wanted to see those girls do their stuff in the flesh." He cackled, added, "You wanna take a look at the sea-gate? The tide's coming in now so I'm closing her up."

"Why not?" said Lawford. He followed Old Ben to the head of well-remembered cellar stairs that opened off the kitchen pantry. Below all was darkness, punctuated by a soft slap-slap of

water. Old Ben reached for the switch alongside the door, turned on the lights.

THE water already covered the cement floor beneath. Old Ben pulled on rubber boots stashed on the top step, led the way down the stairs. Lawford followed as far as the bottom step. He glanced at the dark furnace, said, "What do you do about heat in the winter, Ben?" The basement smelled dank as an old Gothic tomb.

"Got an oil heater in the laundry," replied the older man prosaically as he plodded toward a dim far wall. "This furnace ain't been no good at all since back before the big war, Mister Martin."

With a grunt he reached for a lever close to the masonry. He pushed it forward and a section of wall, toward the sea side of the cellar, seemed to rise up from the submerged floor to hide the leaky masonry. There was a gurgle of water being sucked through some sort of valves. The water visibly subsided to leave nothing but puddles on a shiny-wet cement floor.

They left something else that caught Lawford's attention—a pair of low rubber boots, far smaller than O'd Ben's, stood up neatly side by side against the far wall. Lawford crossed the floor and looked at them and thought, for some reason, of galoshes left on a front porch or slippers outside a Mohammedan mosque.

"Quite a doohinkus, ain't she?" said Old Ben.

"Oh—yes indeed," said Lawford, realizing that his host was referring to the sea-gate. It reminded him of the rising curtain of the old New York Hippodrome of his childhood. This curtain was not curved but it was smooth, machined—apparently made of some resinous plastic material. "Where'd you get it, Ben?" he asked.

"Mrs. Connor had it made," said Old Ben, leading the way back to the stairs. He went on up and Lawford followed, marveling and disturbed at what he had just seen. Surely no local engineer had

built such a barrier—and there were those boots against the wall, waiting—for whom? If it was Belinda, waiting for her to emerge—from what?

Lawford went upstairs and tried to think it through. He had a whisky-and-water and looked out at the ocean after turning off the lights in his room. Moonlight was reflected from the small mountain of quarters atop his dresser and the tip of his cigarette glowed orange in the dim light.

Where, he wondered, had Belinda gone on her date. He tamped out his cigarette and resolved to wait up until he heard her come in. And so, of course, he fell promptly asleep.


He awoke, still sitting in the chair, feeling cramped and uncomfortable and somehow alert as he had not felt upon awakening since his PT-boat command days in the South Pacific during the war. Some sound—some movement translated into sound nearby—had roused him from his unwanted slumber.

It was still dark outside, although the lingerie-pink of early dawn was becoming evident above the eastern horizon, was reflected grayly within the room. From the hall beyond the open door electric light was reflected in far sharper tones, in the mirror.

And something else. . . .

For a moment he thought himself still dreaming. Then he saw that it was Belinda. Her bronze hair, in the long reflection of the glass, was formed in ringlets around her face, piled high on her head. She wore a magnificent heavily brocaded gown spread low across her bosom—a gown that reminded him of photographs of his mother taken long ago. She was looking at the empty bed in puzzlement.

Then the perfect line of throat and chin was altered as something else caught her gaze. She moved swiftly to the dresser and he heard the clink of coins as she swept the quarters he had won at the bar into a gleaming beaded and fringed handbag. She hesitated and he caught what looked like the flicker of



The old mansion broke up and
slid into the foaming waters

a half-smile on her shadowed face.

A hand was plunged into her bosom, withdrew itself quickly. A crisp crinkle of stiff paper and something was deposited on the dresser. Then, with a softer rustle of heavy fabric she had darted out the door. Martin sought to call out to her but his voice rusted in his throat and the quick patter of her feet faded as she went toward her own room at the other end of the house. . . .

HE GOT UP, stiffly, and hobbled to the dresser. His eyes, adjusted to the half-light, had no difficulty in noting what the girl had left in exchange for the silver. It was a clump of bills—a five and four ones—still smelling sweetly of sachet. He smoothed them out, unbelieving what he saw. Although crumpled, they were obviously new bills. And they were large bills, bills of a type that had not been issued since 1928. The back of the five was orange instead of green, indicating it to be redeemable in gold rather than silver.

Somewhere, far away in the house, Lawford could hear Old Ben moving about. He stripped off his clothes and stood by the open window, letting the soft dawn breeze play over his skin. The tide, he saw, was high once more. He thought of those boots in the damp cellar.

Lawford sat up the rest of the night, unable to stem the confusion of thought and emotion that assailed him. A woman who had vanished a dozen or more years ago—Mrs. Connor. A daughter who disappeared without leaving the house and who returned as from a costume ball—Belinda. And why had she taken his silver, left archaic but apparently perfectly good paper money in its place?

He waited, resolving to find out at the earliest possible moment. He felt urgent need of more facts before questioning Belinda. Otherwise, he knew, she would tell him nothing.

At eight o'clock he heard the faint summons of a distant alarm. Shortly other noises were audible down the hall. Lawford waited until the girl had left her room and gone down the back stairs to the kitchen. Then, moving quietly on sneakered feet, he visited her room.

The dress hung in her closet, one of a half dozen costumes of similar period and similar dated magnificence. And the boots were there, on the floor in back. The pile of silver was on her bedside table. Lawford went back to his own room, took a shower and went downstairs.

He thought Belinda regarded him curiously during the silent meal. There were faint violet shadows under her eyes but she seemed otherwise rested and good-humored. When Old Ben belched and complained of heartburn she amiably brought him an alkaline remedy.

After breakfast Lawford drove downtown alone. He went to the bank, sought out the president, an egg-bald little man who recalled him effusively. The bills, Lawford explained, had fallen behind a drawer in his dresser. The egg-man frowned through his pince-nez.

"These are perfectly good," he reported. "They turn up now and again in some of the old houses." He shrugged disapproval. "Some of our former residents had small need to learn the value of money. It's not like that today, no sir, not at all."

"You can say that again," Lawford told him, rising.

He drove back to the house, awash with bewilderment and mounting suspicion. Something very odd was undoubtedly going on—and bitter experience had taught him that when something he did not understand was going on around him he stood to be the loser. He wondered what strange racket the uncommunicative old man and his strangely beautiful, strangely aloof daughter were involved in.

The tide was low once more and Belinda was sunning herself on the beach. He toyed with the idea of joining her and having things out with her—then, noting that Old Ben and his obsolescent suburban were missing, decided first to investigate the cellar once more.

It occurred to him that perhaps, hidden in a recess of the old basement, his parents or grandparents might have left a large cache of money. It would account for the old bills, for Belinda's costly-looking casual clothes. If it did not account for her clinging to a life of near-total isolation in preference to the homage the world would give her, Lawford decided to lay this to a gap in his information. As he did with her Edwardian wardrobe.

The sea-gate wall was lowered and the cement floor all but dry. As he had expected, no boots remained against the south masonry. Lawford studied the lever that operated the gate-wall. Whoever had installed it had known engineering. The works, whatever they were, were housed under an opaque plastic plate laid flush with the floor.

LAWFORD gave the lever a push. It operated with unexpected ease and the sea-gate wall rose soundlessly to shield the cellar from the encroaching waters. He frowned at it, wondering what it was made of, how it worked. Finally, deciding the problem was beyond his present knowledge, he turned back to push the lever that would lower it again to wherever it rested beneath the floor-

level when down.

It was then that he saw the door in the south masonry.

The opening was a plain rectangle—perhaps three feet wide and seven feet tall. Lawford was stumped as to its workings. But it had appeared almost immediately behind the spot where the boots had rested side by side the night before. He blinked at it, found himself unable to plumb the depth beyond. There seemed to be a screen of some sort, not quite opaque, yet not translucent.

He put a hand against it and felt nothing though his hand went through and became a dim shadow. Lawford felt his intestines chill. Whatever this was seemed definitely abnormal.

Then, resenting the bafflements of the past few days, he yielded to sudden impulse and pushed on through. For a moment he was in darkness, a darkness he could *feel* but could not understand. Another step and he could see light in front of him.

Another and he stood in a passage at the foot of a flight of stone steps. The light came from the opening at their top. He climbed them slowly, feeling like a small boy lost in a dream that might at any moment turn into nightmare to roll him, screaming, out of bed.

His first sensory response, since it took his eyes a moment to grow accustomed to the brightness, was olfactory—awareness of a mass of sweet vegetable smells. He might have been in a florist's shop. Then, briefly, he thought he *was* in a florist's shop.

For flowers were all around him, in pots, in wooden beds, in huge stone and porcelain vases. Gaily-colored tropical birds rode on the wooden swings of gilded cages or slept with heads buried beneath their brilliant wings. A manypaned glass roof curved above him; at his feet was a narrow path, picked out in tiny flagstones and bordered with narrow strips of transplanted turf.

Bewilderment vanished as memory came flooding to his relief—to be replaced by even greater bewilderment.

From childhood summers came knowledge of where he stood—but not when. He was in a doorway to the conservatory of the old house, a conservatory he knew to be gaunt and plantless under its broken glass roof.

For a moment he thought he must have been knocked unconscious, must be lying back in the cellar, struck down by some overhanging pipe or cornice he had failed to see in time. Yet his senses told him he was not unconscious, that all of this was real.

Yet it couldn't be real.

Then he heard voices from beyond the open double door that led into the living room where Old Ben liked to sit and watch the roller derby on television. Not knowing what he had blundered into Lawford moved behind a potted palm for better vision and cover.

A man and woman appeared on the threshold and Lawford gulped. The man was tall and dark and frowning—and he wore narrow side-pressed flyless trousers, a narrow-striped five-button blazer, a high stiff collar from which protruded a stiff and slim bow-tie. His hair was slicked down and parted in the center.

He said, "Odd! I didn't expect Belinda today."

The woman wore an ankle-length skirt, a broad patent-leather belt, a throat-high white shirtwaist that broke sharply over her bosom. Her dark hair was piled high on her head, her face, innocent of makeup, was both bored and comely.

She said, "Perhaps there's something wrong with the indicator."

"There'd better not be," said the man with savage emphasis. He moved toward the door to the cellar beside which Lawford stood concealed. "If that girl's idiot father has. . . ."

"Oh, John." The girl pouted. "You'll get all messed up going down there. Besides, there's no real danger now. The tide's not—"

"Perhaps I misread it," said the man, still frowning. "I'll go back and look." He turned and the girl, looking relieved,

turned with him, revealing the pegged and hobbled cut of her skirt. Beyond them Lawford could see dimly a living room equipped with gleaming familiar metal gas fittings, with big gilt-framed pictures and ferns and drapes he remembered all too well.

But this, he decided, was no time to linger. He plunged back through the doorway, down the stairs, past the barrier of darkness into the cellar. There, on impulse, he pushed the lever back. Ten seconds later the door in the south masonry disappeared. Lawford pushed and hammered at the wall—but it seemed solid as ever.

IV

HE DECIDED he needed a drink, though it was still before lunch. Then, in his room, catching sight of Belinda still dozing on the ecru sand, he put down the bottle unopened and scrambled into his swimming trunks.

He watched the sun ripple her bronze hair with gold and wondered what in hell this girl was getting him into, emotionally as well as materially. He shifted slightly to ease the pressure of sand against his diaphragm and said, "Why did you take the silver?"

She lifted her face and wrinkled her nose and brushed a bit of sand from it. She said, "I knew it was foolish. I really wanted to see how you looked asleep."

"I was in the chair," he told her. "You woke me up and I saw you in the mirror. It must have been quite a party—costume ball?"

"It was—very nice," she said, a far-away look in her green eyes. "I probably shouldn't have taken the money. But I have friends who need silver desperately. And I paid for it."

"In old-fashioned bills," he told her.

She dropped her eyes. "That was foolish of me, too," she said. "I think maybe I'm being quite stupid." She paused, added, "But it makes a lot of people ask questions when I turn in old money—and I haven't much of any other kind.

I don't want people to ask questions."

"Including me?" Lawford inquired.

Belinda sat up, squinting against the sun, dusted more sand from her body. "Including you—for a while anyway. Till I get to know you better. What shall we do tonight?"

"This is your bailiwick—you name it," he offered. "New York? Philadelphia? Somewhere along the shore?"

"Anything you want," she replied. She stood up. "Let's go in now. I've got to get lunch ready."

He followed her into the cold clear water, trying not to lose himself utterly in the magic of her curves and grace. After all, he told himself, there was no real hurry. He didn't seek to discover within himself what was pressing him—desire for the girl or a plausible solution to the mystery of the cellar.

It was enough, for the time being, to be with her.

He drove her to a non-eroded resort further south, where they could dine and drink on a stone terrace overlooking the ocean and listen to dance music emerging softly from the ballroom behind them. Belinda was enchanting in a pale green linen dress that matched her eyes, adorned with golden belt and clips that italicized the sunstreaks in her hair.

When the moon had risen and they had danced and returned to their terrace table Lawford said, "You know you're a woman of mystery, don't you, Linda?"

She neither affirmed nor denied it. She studied him and said after a long moment, "There's so much I want to tell you, Martin—but I don't know how to do it. You see, I've kept it locked up inside of myself for what seems all my life."

"These friends of yours—the ones that need the silver—they're part of it, aren't they?" he asked.

She nodded. "Part of it," she said. "The trouble is you have to know certain things—or my poor secret would be dangerous—terribly dangerous. And I don't want anything to—happen to you. Not now."

He looked at her and what he read in

her eyes, in the softening of the corners of her mouth, made him forget all about past failures and present mysteries. He beckoned the waiter, said, "Check, please."

When at last they got back to the old house on the ocean he said, "Where shall we go tomorrow night, darling?"

Her hands went to his near-sleeve—in a defensively fond gesture he had come to know all too well from other women. She said, not looking at him, her voice low, "Not tomorrow—I have a date I can't break."

"Taking the silver to your friends?" he asked quietly.

"That—and other things. They need so little—and want so little. There's a—I'm going to a party."

"Another masquerade?" He could not keep the acid out of his voice.

"You could call it that." She was denying nothing, explaining nothing. "It will be the last time. I promise."

He followed her into the house. She held him tightly for a long moment, her lips clinging and tremulous on his. Then, her breath uneven, she whispered, "We'll do something during the day. And then, if I can arrange things, we can have our nights together."

"Take me with you," he pleaded.

She shook her head. "I don't dare," she told him. "It might mean your—my mother died because of. . . ." Her voice trailed off.

BEFORE he could think of a thing to say she was running up the stairs. He gazed after her, considered pursuit. But just then Old Ben came through from the kitchen. "Back already, Mister Martin?" he said. Then, "You'll have to look after the sea-gate tomorrow night when I go to the roller derby. I'd better show you."

"Why not?" said Lawford. "I'll be glad to do it."

Lawford had trouble sleeping after that. Belinda's promises lingered in his ears, lingered like the repeated pseudo-rhythms of car-wheels passing over rail-

road tracks. *After tomorrow . . . not tomorrow . . . going to a party . . . the last time . . . after tomorrow . . . not tomorrow . . . going to a party . . . the last time . . . after tomorrow . . .*

He recalled the anachronistic figures he had seen in the mysteriously restored conservatory door late the previous morning. The woman had been dressed in the fashion of fifty years ago. As had the man. The man—or perhaps some other man. Was it possible that Belinda refused to live normally in her own time because she had found romance in some other? *The last time . . . after tomorrow . . .*

Lawford felt as if he were going out of his mind. Or perhaps, he thought miserably, he was already out of it. Surely his observation, his thinking, could hardly be called rational. He worried as day came over the waters to the east, as miserably confused and unsure of himself as the hero of any Gothic romance.

But Lawford, no more a hero than any man of his age, was definitely no fate-tossed creature of Gothic moods. With daybreak he determined upon a course of action. It meant foregoing his swimming date with Belinda but he had an idea that seeing her alone before the evening was over would be an invitation to mutual wretchedness.

He got dressed before the house was awake and drove the seventy miles to New York, stopping for breakfast at a Howard Johnson restaurant whose white paint and red-topped cupola flagged him down. When he returned to the MG he noted that clouds were piling up in the west.

It was dinnertime when Lawford got back to Shoreside and the old house. The sky was a dirty gray, shot with gold from the setting sun; the ocean was wearing its shaving soap. Old Ben was awaiting him impatiently in the living room.

"You'd better stay home—it looks as if a storm's blowing up," Lawford told him.

"And miss seein' those gals do their

stuff!" It was an exclamation, not a question. "I was afraid you wouldn't get back. You gotta tend the sea-gate while I'm gone. Remember, follow the tide-chart tacked to the cellar stairs wall. Put the gate up when the tide's half in. Let's see, that'll be at nine fifty-two, P.M. If I'm not back later, you'll have to put the gate down when the tide's half out to clear the cellar of leakage. That'll be at three forty A.M."

"Nine fifty-two—gate up," said Lawford. "Three forty—gate down. How's that, Ben?"

"Mind you do it," warned the old man. "I don't want to feel I got to hurry. And I ain't aiming to get back and find this place washed into the sea."

"Where's Belinda?" Lawford asked.

Old Ben looked disinterested. "She fussed when she found you wasn't here," said Old Ben. "Then she took off this afternoon. She ain't comin' back till late, I guess. Dinner's on the table."

Dinner was cold but good. Lawford managed to consume it only because he had not eaten lunch. He saw the old man off in his battered suburban on the drive to Jersey City, where the roller derby was performing that night. Then he took the parcel he had brought back from the city and took it upstairs with him. Gusts of wind were making the panes rattle in the window bay, while rain squalls beat occasional tattoos against the glass.

Lawford put the big box on the bed and opened it. He felt a little foolish as he pulled out the archaic tail coat, the appallingly high white collar, the tight trousers with corded braid, the heavy brocaded white satin waistcoat. Yet, somehow, he was only doing what he had to do. He could not let Belinda go to her last party alone. . . .

SINCE he still had a couple of hours he took his time about bathing and getting into the Edwardian evening clothes. He even sipped a couple of highballs from his waning bottle of well-aged Scotch. It was nine forty-five when he pulled even the ends of his white tie and

looked at himself in the glass.

When I first put this uniform on . . . he thought. Then, *I may not know where I'm going but at least I'm dressed for the occasion.*

He went downstairs and opened the cellar stairs door and turned on the light. There were several inches of water covering the floor. Holding his pumps in his hand, Lawford pulled on Old Ben's boots and clumped down the wooden stairs. Belinda's boots were back against the south wall to give him reassurance that he was not out of his mind.

He gave the lever a push and watched the plastic barrier rise out of the floor. If he did nothing else, he told himself, he was going to discover how such a device could come out of a seemingly Edwardian culture. He told himself he must be going crazy for what he was thinking. *Edwardian world. . . .*

The door in the south masonry opened silently, leaving Belinda's boots standing neatly beside it. The water was already receding as Lawford parked Old Ben's boots beside hers, pulled on his pumps and made his way through the darkness. The floor on the far side was bone dry.

For a few moments he thought he must have been trapped in the barrier, whatever it might be. For the darkness seemed not to end as he kept walking. He was about to turn and grope his way back when he tripped and almost stumbled over the bottom step. Looking up he could see a thin rectangle of light above him.

He understood then. The door to the conservatory was shut. As he felt his way up the steps he heard, faintly, the sounds of violin strings playing a waltz. By the time he reached the top he had regained his confidence and opened the door and stepped through.

Again the almost overpowering scent of sweet vegetation assailed him as he blinked in the light of cut-glass globes set around the walls of the conservatory. The music had changed while he was making his way up the cellar stairs—strains of Sousa's *El Capitan* two-step

echoed pleasantly throughout the glassed-in chamber. The birds twittered nervously in their cages.

To his right, concealed from the general view by the same potted palm behind which he had found concealment that previous morning, a couple clad in Charles Dana Gibson garments were mutually enclosed in a thoroughly unGibsonlike embrace. Lawford made an involuntary movement toward them, then halted as he saw the girl's hair was golden, not bronze.

They drew apart and the girl said, "Very nice, Philip—but it does grow tiresome, the same thing with the same people, night after night. I'd love to meet some fresh people."

"So should I," said the man surprisingly, stroking his well-swept brown mustache. "But we can't have everything, can we?" He offered his elbow and they walked past Lawford, arm in arm, on their way back to the dancing.

Lawford followed them discreetly. The living room carpet had been taken up, the furniture mostly removed. A score of couples danced sedately to the music, which seemed to emerge from an orchestra concealed behind an impenetrable bank of potted rubber plants interspersed with ferns.

Not finding Belinda among the dancers Lawford made his way through the hall, where a grave-faced butler stood guard by the front door, to the dining room, where a punchbowl had been set up. All around him impeccably clad Edwardians moved gracefully about their festivities. But there was an aura of tired formality to their walk, to their collective voice, that puzzled him. Unless his parents and their friends had lied, the early century had been a gay and festive era despite the enforced rigidities of corset and stiff shirtfront.

The French windows that led from the dining room to the porch were open and no sign of a storm came through them. Sipping an excellent champagne punch, given him by a liveried footman, Lawford continued to look vainly for

Belinda. He felt like a gate-crasher, had to remind himself sternly that he was in his own house.

A stout youngish man drifted to his side, noted that he was not carrying a dance program with its dangling tasseled pencil, said, "Just get in?" And, at Lawford's nod, "You had your nerve, risking the trip from Capri. Still I admire you for it."

"It was nothing," said Lawford.

"I only wish some of us had the courage," said his colloquer. "We do get awfully bored with one another, you know. But of course so do you—if you weren't bored with your own group you'd never have risked the trip. Care to meet some of our young ladies? I can guarantee you a warm reception." He winked knowingly.

"There's no hurry," said Lawford after thanking the man.

"Take a good look around first," said the other, who was evidently well into his cups. He winked again, gave Lawford a pat on the shoulder, added, "Just ask for Harry Morton. Proud to be of service in any way I can, sir."

"Thanks, Morton," said Lawford. "I'm Martin. . ." For some reason he decided against giving his full name. After all, the whole business was so damned out of all sanity. He added, "You don't happen to know where Miss Connor is, do you?"

Morton's mouth fell open, revealing a remarkably perfect set of teeth. Come to think of it, Lawford thought, he had yet to see any other sort in this travesty of his family's summer home—which did not seem in line with Edwardian dentistry. Morton said, "So you know about our connector—quite a girl, Belinda." There was a gleam of either speculation or reminiscence in Harry Morton's slightly bloodshot eyes that Lawford didn't like.

"I'll keep an eye open for her," said Morton, wandering off.

LAWFORD went out to the porch through the open French window. It

was like turning back the clock. Here was no ocean-eroded beach. Here was Shoreside in its pristine and turreted glory. Here was the moon, shining on neat white piers and jetties at which trim yachts waited for passengers. Southward, to his right, he could see the defunct Tewkesbury mansion, its windows aglow—to his left, beyond a string of other summer palaces, rose the gaily ugly mass of the old Bath Club—a Bath Club restored to its youthful prime.

"Shall we walk along the beach in the moonlight?" a soft feminine voice asked close to his ear.

Lawford turned quickly, looked down into the blue eyes of the girl he had seen embracing the mustached man in the conservatory. He said, "I'm sorry, ma'am, but I'm looking for somebody."

"And you've found *me!*" she exclaimed without raising her voice. She laughed softly, added, "I saw you come through the gateway but I didn't want Philip to see you. Heaven only knows what might have happened to you." Then, "Shall we?"

"We shall," said Lawford, helpless in the grip of his unwanted enchantress. "Though why you're picking on me I—"

"Because you're a man and you're new," said the woman with a bright smile, pressing close against him. "Because I don't think you understand or you wouldn't have come here. By the way, *where* did you get that suit?"

"At a costumer's in New York" he said. "Why? Is there something wrong with it?"

"No, it's too terribly right," was the baffling reply. "I had no idea your costumers were clever enough to make clothes not yet. . . ." Her voice trailed off and she added, "It makes me feel terribly unreal." Lawford knew this was not what she had started to say.

"Tell me," he said to change the subject. "Why Edwardian?"

The golden-haired woman looked up at him, puzzled. Then she shrugged and replied, "Why not? It was the final age of elegance." She paused, added,

"How much do you know anyway? How much has that lit—how much has Belinda told you?"

"Nothing—yet," he replied. "But I've been doing some snooping for myself. You see I own—owned—or will own—the house."

She looked startled, pressed his arm convulsively in hers. "How strange!" she exclaimed in faintly alien accents. "But of course! You're why Belinda. . ." A pause, then, "I'm Lucia—Lucia Zenaro."

"From Capri?" he asked.

"Visiting," she told him. "And you're—you must be one of the Lawfords." She frowned, added, "If I knew your name I might. . ."

"I'm Martin Lawford," he told her.

"This is delightful," she said with a low ripple of sensual laughter. "If only I had found you sooner—my visit here is almost over. But perhaps you could come to Capri."

"Let's rush things, shall we?" he countered drily.

"Don't be tiresome," she chided. Then, "Don't you like me?"

She stood before him in the silver-and-shadow of the moonlight, alluring, decadent, altogether too attractive, altogether like too many other women of the world he had fled. She said in a semi-whisper, "We could walk to the end of the beach. No one will see us. I know a place. . ."

She felt his rigid reluctance and laughed again softly. "But not you, *carissimus*. You think only of your Belinda. Come, I shall take you to her."

"If you wouldn't mind," he said politely.

"*Pas du tout*," she replied. They had walked perhaps seventy-five yards along the sands to the south. She led him across the lawn, whose wool-soft turf was innocent of dew, to the French windows that led into the library off bath ballroom and conservatory of the big old mansion.

"In there," Lucia said, "you'll find Belinda." With a gentle push that

started him through one of the windows, she was gone.

Belinda was there—but she didn't see Lawford. She was held tightly in the arms of the man of the other morning, the man called John. He was looking into her eyes almost fiercely and saying, "You can never desert us, Linda, and you know it. Your life is tied to mine, to Philip's, to Harry's, to Millie's, to all of ours—by bonds neither you nor we can break. . . ."

Belinda saw Lawford then and stiffened, her green eyes widening. Feeling a sudden savage disillusionment, Lawford turned and stumbled from the room, back across the soft lawn to the beach. He walked blindly along the sands, listening to the gentle love-words of the waves and wondering what complex perfidy lay hidden beneath their languorous amiability.

V

AT THE foot of the path leading up between tall hedgerows to the brightly lighted Tewkesbury mansion he paused, considered entering as he saw men and women in elaborate Edwardian costume passing to and fro across the glowing rectangles of its doors and windows. Perhaps, he thought, he could get a drink from another punchbowl.

But something held him back. The entire experience was too appalling, too incredible. He blundered on along the beach, wondering what was this strange false-Edwardian world, or segment of one, into which he had climbed via the cellar steps with the vanishing doorway.

What claim had John and Philip and the half-drunken Harry Morton on Belinda Connor? What claim did this fantastic unreality exert over the girl? Who or what was Lucia Zenaro, why the taken-for-granted tie with Capri of all places?

Lawford's thoughts became squirrels on a wheel, racing so rapidly and with so little progress that they merged into grayness. He walked on—and reached

the barrier. He could see the beach, stretching to the southward in accord with his memories of it from his childhood. Lighted windows in other houses beckoned, as did the moon-laced serenity of the broad Atlantic.

But beyond a certain point he could not go. There was no direct contact with any unseen wall. But looking at his tracks in the sand he could see how they curved and refused to pass a definite line. Puzzled, he moved along the barrier, inland, toward the slope of grass lawn above him.

And at its foot, where the beach ended, he found the damp patch on the sand. Puzzled, he crouched over it, poked a finger into it, found that somehow the sea was seeping through at this point—for the water on his finger was salt. He stoop up, wiped sand from his fingers with his handkerchief—and saw Belinda hastening toward him, her long skirt draped over one arm to keep her from tripping over her train.

She said, half-gasping, "Martin, you fool!" She laid her free hand on his right wrist. "You don't know—you can't know—what you've done. You've got to get back."

He looked at her, read the desperation in her eyes, shadowed as they were in the moonlight—if it were moonlight. The accusations lying too close to his tongue were checked. He said, "Sorry if I've botched things for you, Linda."

"It's not that—it's you," she said, urging him back toward his own house. "The very air is deadly. Besides, if John catches you. . . ." She left the rest unsaid.

Lucia must have been watching them both. She stepped out from behind a bit of landscaped shrubbery as they were hurrying past. She smiled and checked them and said, "Must we be in quite such a hurry to hide our prize, Linda, my sweet?"

"Lucia!" said Belinda in open entreaty. "Martin doesn't know. He hasn't been immunized like you and me. He's got to get out of here."

The blonde from Capri looked him over appraisingly, then said, "But Linda, he's been here too long already. So why not make what time he has left a pleasant interlude—for all of us." She laughed and added, "I'm not ungenerous—I'm willing to share him."

"There may be a chance," Belinda said doggedly. "It may be vanishing even now, while we stand here talking foolishly."

"Foolishly? I think not," replied Lucia, raising one carefully plucked eyebrow in a perfect arch. "Sometimes I think you are still a child, Linda—a pretty one but still a child." She faced Belinda with arrogant assurance, added, "Besides, this is hardly the moment to try anything. Look. . . ."

They turned toward the driveway as automobile horns sounded and the voices of men and women rose in cries of greeting. "My party has arrived," said Lucia needlessly.

The procession—or rather the motorcade—that rolled slowly into the driveway toward the porte cochere was not a large one. But it was gay and utterly in period, consisting of a half dozen pre-1911 automobiles, each driven by a capped dustered and goggled chauffeur and carrying men and women in rainbow-gay period costumes.

IF THE entire affair weren't mere pageantry—if the new arrivals really did come from Capri—Lawford wondered how the devil they had got there. He began to wonder about a number of things. Thanks perhaps to the twilight mood in which he had fled to Shoreside he had been accepting the strangeness of recent happenings without query, walking through recent events like a man in a dream.

Now, standing beside Belinda and the carnivorous Lucia, watching the visitors descend from the ancient motor-cars with lush gift-baskets and packages to embrace and be embraced by their hosts, he became aware that all of it was overwhelmingly real. And with acceptance

came questions.

Who and what were these people? When and where was this sealed—in world of theirs and what was its nature? Why had they selected his own house and the Edwardian era? Why did they need "connectors"—as Harry Morton had called Belinda? Why did they need iron and silver, even in small amounts?

He looked at Belinda, seeking her attention, discovered that she and Lucia were arguing hotly over him. Belinda seemed close to tears as she said, "But why, Lucia, why want a man who obviously doesn't want you?"

"Why want one who does?" was the reply. "That makes the game no contest." With the words went a lazy shrug, a ripple of low and derisive laughter.

"And what about me?" Lawford asked.

"You've got to get out of here—now. *Come!*" cried Belinda, seizing his arm. "If you don't. . . ."

"It's too late already," said Lucia. "Why not let him have his fun, Linda?"

"Shut up!" Belinda said fiercely. "Shut up, you creep!"

Lucia, trotting alongside, opened her mouth to utter a suitable retort. But Harry Morton, glass in hand, chose that moment to wander a trifle unsteadily out of the French window they were approaching. He peered at them through narrowed eyes.

"Ah," he said jovially, "the man from Capri." And then, as Harry and Belinda tried to push past him. "Hold on there—you aren't from Capri. You were here before them." His eyes darted toward the driveway, where the greeting was still in progress, an unexpectedly powerful hand gripped one of Lawford's forearms.

"Who are you?" Morton asked, obviously forcing himself back to sobriety. And, to the women, "Who is he, Linda—Lucia?"

"He's an outland—" Lucia began.

Belinda closed her mouth with a right uppercut that sent the blonde from Capri staggering backward to sit down

hard on the turf. She turned toward Morton, whose grip on Lawford had relaxed, said, "I'm getting him out of here now," then stepped hard on his foot with a sharp high heel.

Morton's mouth became a circle of anguish. His drink spilled from the tumble as he bent forward unsteadily. He said, "Linda—you've let one of *them* in here." He lifted his voice, shouted, "*Philip—John—help!*" He made a futile grab at Lawford's coattails as Belinda and Lawford pushed past him by main force into the ballroom.

"Get back—quick!" gasped the girl, rushing him toward the conservatory across the almost empty floor. Apparently all but a scattered few of the dancers had moved outside to greet the new arrivals. She added, "I hope it's not too late."

"You're not staying!" he cried at the entrance to the cellar door. He saw the tears welling in her green eyes, wondered a little at their presence. After all, they had known one another but a few—

"I must," she replied. "I'll join you there—" with a nod toward the cellar steps—"as soon as I can. But hurry, darling—please hurry. You don't know. It may already be too late."

"What may—" he began, stopped abruptly as he saw the doorway fill with Edwardians, headed by the man named John, who was carrying an odd-looking but singularly businesslike looking weapon in his hands. Belinda pushed him through the doorway with a sob in her throat.

AS A result Lawford fell rather than walked down the steps. He didn't quite lose his balance but engaged in a sort of downhill Off-to-Buffalo in an effort to retain it, was still staggering when he reached the bottom and reeled through the opaque barrier.

He emerged under water and damned near drowned. His first impulse was to get back through the barrier, but he could not find the door. The water was turbulent and for a second or two he

thought he was going to drown. Then, with panic about to overwhelm him, he broke clear of the surface, found himself afloat with his head on a level more than halfway up the cellar steps.

Luckily light still streamed through the doorway. Lawford struck out toward it, feeling bogged down and helpless in his heavy waterlogged clothing. Various bits of flotsam were also afloat and he pushed aside a rude wooden chair, and saw what could only be a body face downward on the surface.

It was Old Ben Connor. Somehow Lawford managed to reach the caretaker, to drag him to the steps and then out of that flooded basement. He laid Ben down on the kitchen floor, set his head on one side, pulled out his tongue—then squatted astride him and got to work.

Twenty minutes later he became aware that Old Ben had drowned. With a horrible feeling of guilt Lawford looked up at the clock on the kitchen wall. It was seven minutes of five in the morning. He had failed to get back in time to close the gate. Evidently Old Ben had returned from the roller derby to find the basement flooding, had valiantly gone down to make up for his dereliction—and drowned.

The lights flickered, went out, went on again—and Lawford became miserably aware of something else. The house was shaking like a bone in a dog's mouth as the storm-raged violently around it. He felt the floor beneath him slip and tilt, heard the old house groan in extremis about him.

Under the spell of the moonlit tranquillity in what he was already terming to himself the "other world" he had forgotten about the weather in his own world. Thanks to his dereliction about the seagate, it looked and felt as if the old house were finally about to slip into the hungry ocean devouring its foundations.

He picked up Old Ben's body in a fireman's lift, carried him outside and laid him under the porte cochere. Then, hur-

rying, he went back into the house, turning on lights as he progressed to his own room. There he stripped off his costume, collected what gear he could, donned more suitable slacks and sportshirt and, lugging his suitcase in one hand, his Scotch in the other, fled for the stairs.

As he reached their foot the lights went out and Lawford made his way to the front door by feel while the house lurched again under him. He made it as the crunch of tearing timbers from the sea-side of the old mansion told him the place was finally breaking up. He went to the former carriage house that served to garage his MG and Old Ben's suburban. It was fifty feet inland from the house and safe. He put bag and bottle in the sports car, then retrieved Old Ben and got his body into its shelter.

Lawford stood in the doorway and thought of *The Fall of the House of Usher* and watched the old summer mansion break up, piece by piece, and slide into the raging foaming waters beyond. An hour later only the porte cochere and a portion of the façade of the structure remained silhouetted against the streaked yellow-gray of dawn through the breaking clouds.

He thought that even here he had managed, through his bungling self-interest, to bring destruction. And this time he had brought death as well—to Old Ben. And what had he brought to Belinda? He couldn't even let himself think about it—not then. Instead he drove into town alone to tell the authorities what had happened. . . .

The next forty-eight hours were dreary. Save for occasional breaks the storm continued to rage. The police were polite and on the whole sympathetic. Thanks to her reputation for strange disappearances his inability to explain more about Belinda than that she had gone out the evening the house fell into the sea did not get Lawford into trouble.

He took temporary lodgings in the town itself, over a drug store, and wondered what to do next. There was the

matter of Old Ben's burial, of course, but he had made the arrangements and once the funeral was over that chapter would be closed. And what was he to do? Should he wait in Shoreside for Belinda's reappearance? Or should he try to write finis to the whole miserable business and seek haven and a living elsewhere? His last root had been plucked out.

Nor was he helped by the fact that he seemed to have picked up some sort of bug. What he explained away first as mere emotional and physical exhaustion after the disaster, failed to disappear with rest. An unpleasant inertia, coupled with sensations like those of high fever, rendered even the slightest of efforts backbreaking toil.

And when he stood in the rain, with a few townfolk, and watched Old Ben's body being lowered into a muddy grave in the local cemetery, he knew suddenly that he was going to die. He turned away from the simple ceremony to blunder into the shelter of his little car, became aware he was not going to make it. His chief sensation was one of vast relief as the soggy ground rose to meet him.

I'm well out of it, he thought briefly as unconsciousness folded its dark wings over him. . . .

VI

LAWFORD was not fully conscious again for a long time. He was vaguely aware at times that he was in a hospital somewhere—each time he believed himself looking into Belinda's intriguingly assembled features they dissolved into the large-pored and efficient countenance of a woman he knew somewhere in the back of his brain to be his nurse. At this he would gladly relapse into darkness again.

He was aware of an appalling lassitude, of a sense not so much of sickness as of not being well. And once in a while he would find himself back in the flooded basement, wrestling Old Ben Connor's body back into the kitchen—and at such

times he was glad to awaken, if only to brief and uncomfortable awareness. For he knew that if he was in a hospital he must be very sick.

Then one day he found himself sitting up on his cot and eating tasteless custard from a tray. Half-familiar doctors, some in Navy uniforms with well-striped sleeves, poked their heads in at intervals and exchanged meaningless question-and-answer routines as to how he was feeling.

He pushed the custard away with finality and said to the nurse, "What in hell is this all about anyway?"

She stared at him and he wondered if, under other circumstances, she might not be attractive. Then she said, "I'll get Commander Johnson. He can tell you better than I."

Another of the half-familiar faces—this one framed by closecut graying hair—a lined patient friendly face at the moment illuminated by quiet joy. Its owner said, "You're our prize guinea-pig, Lawford. You've had it—all the way—and you're okay now or the next thing to it." He sighed. "So I'll have to turn you over to the A.E.C. boys. Pity the Pygmalion whose Galatea belongs to somebody else."

"I think you're cute too, doctor," said Lawford, more baffled than before. "But where am I—and what have I to do with the Atomic Energy Commission?"

"This is Bethesda Naval Hospital," Commander Johnson said unhappily. "And if they don't mine you for radioactives you can thank us for getting them out of your system. You've had it, boy."

There was more—but beyond the fact that it was now late September, proving that he had been under care for almost six weeks, it interested Lawford little. He wondered if he had been radioactive enough to glow in the dark. He didn't even care much that he was sterile—or so they told him.

For his being radioactive made sense after a fashion once he began resavoring his pre-hospital memories. It explained

the mysterious death of Mrs. Connor, it explained Belinda's unwillingness to have him enter her other world, her near-hysterical insistence upon getting him out of it quickly. *Yeow*, he thought, *I'm a walking radium tree*. But he wondered what had become of Belinda.

The A.E.C. people came the following afternoon, accompanied by Bill Travers, Lawford's family attorney. They had a lot of papers for him to sign and there was a certain amount of careful explaining. It appeared that Lawford was alive only because a local physician at Shore-side had been in Japan with the Occupation and had spotted the cause of Lawford's collapse at Old Ben's graveside as severe hard-radiation-burn.

His service in the Navy during the war, plus the oddness of his ailment, caused his transfer to Bethesda, where a half-dozen new techniques were tried on him without avail and a seventh method that worked. He was a living, breathing triumph of atomic age medicine.

Furthermore it appeared as if his financial worries were over for some time to come. Security was as puzzled as the doctors by his weird sickness and got to work tracing its source. Nor had this proved hard to find.

THE entire area around what had formerly been the Lawford mansion was absurdly radioactive. The nature of the ore with which the ground itself was impregnated was a major puzzle, since there was no apparent reason for radioactivity at all. But it was rich. . . .

Travers had worked it all out for Lawford. All he had to do was sign papers in triplicate. They were paying him fifty grand against a ninety-nine-year lease at twelve grand per annum, plus a fifteen-grand bonus for discovery of the vein. There was also a royalty contract, operative for the first fifty months of the lease, or until the rent advance was used up.

Along with his pension it didn't look as if Lawford were ever going to be hungry. Even after taxes he was going

to be comfortably well-off. It was a little hard to accept emotionally. And, when one of the officials asked him what he was going to do when he got out of the hospital, he was surprised to hear himself say, "Me? I'm going to make like the Emperor Tiberius. I'm going to Capri and live it up."

He must, he decided, have made the decision while he was still unconscious.

Three weeks later—accompanied by a precious stock of capsules to be taken against recurrence of his radium-poisoning and one of those phonetic Anglo-Italian dictionaries that look and sound so ridiculous and work so well—Lawford was off for Rome in a big double-decked Pan American "flying cocktail lounge."

Before letting him out of the Naval Hospital Commander Johnson had told him, "Martin, we don't know what may happen to you in time. Hell man, you may grow three heads or a tail. You may not need this alchemical mess I've mixed for you—but you'd better take it just in case."

"I think I'd like a tail," mused Lawford. "I could curl it around my wrist walking down the street or maybe lead an orchestra with it like the King of the Cats in the Benet story. I wouldn't like three heads though—not on the average Monday morning."

The commander winced. "You'll do," he said. "You're probably healthier right now than you've ever been in your life. While we had you flat on your back we drove all the bad microbes out of you." He paused, added, "What are you going to do with yourself now you're rich and healthy—not that it's any of my business."

"Believe it or not," Lawford told him, "I'm going hunting—for a girl."

"On Capri? Well, why not? Still," the Naval doctor added, "I ought to warn you again—it's unlikely you'll ever have children. We can't be sure of course, but if it should happen, if you're sure, I'd appreciate your letting me know. Something for the old case history."

"I've got to find the girl first," Lawford told him.

Commander Johnson studied him briefly, appraisingly. "That shouldn't be too difficult," he said.

Lawford had laughed. "You have no idea," was his parting remark. In retrospect he found himself liking the Naval doctor even better than he had during his convalescence.

The worst of it was that he didn't know just what he was looking for on the magic island off Naples. He took modest lodgings in a tiny town at the foot of the cliff and spent most of his time lying on a pebbly beach which made him long for the smooth Jersey sands, or trying to improve his staggering Italian by conversation with the natives. In the course of three weeks he saw a famous English novelist, Edda Mussolini Ciano, three Hollywood stars of assorted sexes and five Italian movie actresses of whose sex there was no slightest doubt, a New York mob leader in exile and an Arab mystery billionaire from Tangier.

But, though he covered every square foot of the island on which he was allowed to tread—including a spelunking expedition to the underwater grottoes—he found no trace of a gateway, no clue to the existence of any such tradition among either natives or colonists.

He rented a small sailboat and played tag with the reefs off-shore, prepared to make an "emergency" landing upon sight of anything reminiscent of the Shoreside setup—and found nothing at all, save a finer sunburn than any he had had since wartime Pacific days.

Then, one evening he came ashore with a block from the rigging of his boat that needed fixing. He took it to the shop of the aged buccannier whose place of business lay just beyond the two-table pavement—not sidewalk—cafe on whose further side was the ancient inn where he had managed to find a room.

The shop was a littered, musty, fascinating little place, whose long-mustachioed proprietor repaired whatever was brought to him to fix and spent the

rest of his time carving or creating whatever took his fancy—from tiny cross-eyed wooden cats to elaborate gilded models of the Emperor Tiberius's Imperial Barge.

WHEN Lawford came in he laid aside a half-carved piece of wood and, in highly unintelligible Americanese, settled the problem of the ailing block. "Tomorrow morning—half after noon—I have it ready for you, Signor," he said politely.

"Tomorrow morning—half after

MUTANT

Check-and-Balance are the scales

In Nature's engineering;

A system where no Loss prevails,

No Bulk is domineering.

His wife, however, wasn't swayed

By Nature's pioneering;

Her cheeks kept spreading undismayed,

His balance disappearing!

by A. Kulik

noon," affirmed an amused Lawford. Then, picking up the wood on which the proprietor was working, "What's this, Ernesto?"

Ernesto looked embarrassed. It took a little while but Lawford finally learned that it was a queer kind of gun that a lady had once brought him to fix. He was carving it to fix its odd design in his own memory, not because he hoped to sell it.

"Who was the lady, Ernesto?" Lawford asked. He felt like a freshly plucked lute-string. For he too had seen one of these "queer kind" of guns. The enigmatic John, of the world in which he had left Belinda, had been holding one as Belinda pushed him through the door to the cellar stairs. There was no mistaking the odd disc-series at the muzzle or the spiral arc of what seemed to be its magazine.

Ernesto shrugged. "She pretty lady, Signor," he said. Lawford was finally able to learn that, while Ernesto did not know where she lived, he knew her to be a permanent resident if an upper-caste one. He promised to let Lawford know the next time she visited the village.

"It is like American children's space-gun," said Ernesto admiringly. "I make it for my grandson. He like, no?"

"You let me know the next time the pretty lady comes to town," said Lawford. "I'll be either in the cafe, the hotel or on the jetty."

He hung around for five days and nothing happened. They were stormy days and lonely ones. Had it not been for the assurance that he was definitely close to the object of his search he would have gone out of his mind from boredom. As it was he did not even dare get drunk lest he miss out on opportunity.

And with the passage of the days he began to wonder as to just what was the object of his search. He had no real assurance that, if he did manage to make contact with the strange folk who had set up their strange life about his former house in New Jersey, such contact would lead him to Belinda.

More likely it would lead simply to personal disaster for himself—for unmistakable malevolence was implicit in his impression of the pseudo-Edwardians, who or whatever they might be. He was not even sure Belinda was still alive. Though how anyone could destroy her. . . .

Eaten by doubts and restlessness, he decided to take his boat out when the weather finally cleared, which it did on the sixth day. It was one of those topaz-and-azure-and-white days for which the Mediterranean was famous. The ocean swelled gently with just the faintest apogetic reminders of its recent violence. Lawford coursed the reefs and let the sun reclaim its bronze shadow on his naked back as he sat at the tiller and let a not unhappy melancholia course through him.

He was only vaguely aware of the ap-

proach of the motor launch, so deeply absorbed was he in his reverie, until he found his small craft rocking dangerously in its wake. He did some thoroughly nautical cursing as his boat did a fair imitation of a bucking bronco in the Great Southwest and yawed into a luff to lose headway.

He glared at the object of his annoyance, a low lean lovely creation of gleaming mahogany and glittering stainless steel that rose almost daintily on its step and slit the water like a razor through fabric, saw that it was swinging about to pass him again—to pass him or to ram him.

Annoyingly he recalled the ancient joke about the motorist who, having knocked down a pedestrian, called, "Watch out there!" At which the bruised pedestrian replied, "Why—are you coming back?"

THE motor launch was definitely coming back. It headed directly toward his craft between twin curls of spray, then sheered away to pass close alongside. He caught a glimpse of its pilot, a gaudily sun bronzed woman wearing dark goggles and the briefest of bright yellow Bikini bathing suits. As she passed she peered at him until she all but lost control of the wheel, then was gone, again leaving him the thankless task of dealing with the wake.

Goggles and all, she might have seen a ghost from her actions at sight of him. And while he worked rapidly with tiller and sheets, Lawford felt recognition sweep over him. Despite the concealing goggles there was familiarity in that not unpretty face—and the hair above and about it was golden blonde.

Lucia Zenaro—it could have been nobody else. Lucia was the lady of the motorboat. Lawford promptly headed for home, watching with a fury of repression the swift motor cruiser dwindled to a dot, then to nothing as it fled for its Capri base. He was almost tempted to leap overboard and swim the four or five kilometers back.

Somehow he had known Ernesto's pretty lady would be Lucia—she almost had to be the "connector" for the Capri group. It had been inherent in her attitude toward Belinda, toward himself. Only an attractive woman, who could move in both worlds with safety, would have been so arrogant, so sure of herself. From his brief encounter with the—others, he could think of no fitting word for them—Lawford had derived a definite impression of insecurity.

Whatever was going to happen had begun. Of that he was sure—and thanks to this assurance relief balanced his impatience on the slow sail back to harbor. No wonder Lucia had stared at him in disbelief, as if at a ghost. To her he must have looked like one. And the mere fact of his existence would be sufficiently shocking to ensure prompt action. Of that he was certain.

It was late afternoon when he got back to his lodging. Lawford donned sneakers, slacks and a jacket, for the weather was unseasonably cool following the storm, once the sun was low. He ate alone at the little cobblestone cafe, under a gaudy umbrella whose colors faded with the sunset, lingered until closing, sipping red wine carefully so as not to dull his senses, chatting briefly now and again with acquaintances who dropped by his table.

Nothing happened. Lawford thought, late, of beginning an inquiry about Lucia—if she were a resident, surely her address must be known to the islanders—then decided to put such search over until the next day. There was going to be plenty of time—now.

He went reluctantly to his room, stripped to his shorts and lay on his back in bed with his hands locked behind his head, thinking over the events of the day, of the past two-and-a-half months, of Lucia, of the Edwardians—for such he now called them—of Belinda.

He was still thinking of her when, without knocking, she slipped into the room. For a moment, seeing the grace-

ful feminine form in the near-darkness, he took it for granted it was Lucia. His hand slipped under the pillow to grip the small automatic he had placed there upon lying down. Then she said, "Martin!" softly and he knew who it was and sat up and reached for her.

SHE embraced him briefly, unbelievably, then said, "Not now, Martin—we haven't time. They are coming for you. I overheard Lucia talking to them. She doesn't know I understand Italian. I speak it so badly. We've got to get out of here. They want you."

"How about you?" he asked her, exploring lovingly the body he had thought never to hold in his arms again. "How about you?"

"We haven't time, darling," she protested, then framed his face in the palms of her hands and kissed him lingeringly. Her eyes looked deep in her head as she drew away and added, "They're sending some men for you. They don't understand why you're alive. They'll make a guinea-pig out of you, darling."

"Having just been a guinea-pig I'm not anxious to repeat the experience," he said. He got out of bed, reached for his outer clothing, asked, "How are we going to get out of here, honey?"

"We'll have to hide till daylight," said Belinda in the voice whose memory had been haunting him for weeks. "Then we can take a boat or a plane somewhere. I've got plenty of money."

"Sweet!" He hugged her briefly. "So have I. But why not get off tonight? We can sail my boat to Naples and take off from there."

Close together, they sneaked out of the little hotel, picked their way across the cobbled streets outside, sticking to the shadows until they reached the wharf where Lawford's boat lay moored. They were neither molested nor followed.

Thanks to Belinda's attitude and fears Lawford expected them to be stopped all the while he was putting up sail and untying the painter that held his rented boat to the wharf. Yet when no one did

stop them he began to wonder at her perturbation, even though he was aglow with the miracle of having found her again.

Once they were clear of the jetty he said, "Why should your—Edwardians want to stop us, darling?"

Linda, huddled close beside him in the cockpit, looked up at him in the moon-swept darkness and said, "You're alive, Martin." She said it as if she couldn't quite believe it.

"Yes, dammit, very much alive," he replied a trifle brusquely, "But that doesn't answer my question."

"But it does," she told him simply. "It does. You see, you ought to be dead after being exposed to *their* world."

"Oh," he said, thinking it over. The radiations, of course—it must have been these that killed her mother. He said, "I was sick as a dog but they pulled me through at the Naval Hospital. Apparently they've been doing wonderful things about radiation poisoning. But I still don't understand why..." He shook his head.

"Why they want you?" she asked. Then, "Before I tell you what I know or guess, please answer me this—why did you come to Capri?"

"It was my only clue to you," he said. "Why did you come?"

She was silent and he looked down at her and then she said in a small non-assertive voice, "After the Shoreside gateway was destroyed that night I knew Capri was the only place you could find me."

He kissed her. Then, tightly, he said, "I've got to tell you this, honey—by doing what I did that night the gateway was destroyed—I caused your father's death."

"I know," she said simply. "They told me about it. They told me you were dead—that you collapsed at the funeral."

"I did that," he said. Then, anxiously, "But you're not angry—about your father, I mean?"

"No." Her voice was low but definite. "No, I knew it was nobody's fault. You

couldn't understand the risks any more than he did. And anyway—you did arrange for him to see the roller derby."

"Shut up, you magnanimous creature," he told her. "You'll have me in tears. But thanks—I'd have understood if you'd felt differently. I'm grateful you don't."

"Dad and I hadn't been close—really close—for years," she told him. "His life was lived—I don't think he would have wanted to go on after the house was destroyed. In a way, he died defending it."

LAWFORD brought the little boat about into the wind on another tack. Then he said, "Why am I so important to them, Linda?"

"Because you didn't die," she said. "Lucia came back this afternoon—yesterday, I guess it is now—and told Luigi about seeing you. You see, darling, these people aren't from the past. They're from the future—the distant future. That's why they and their world are so radioactive. It's a terrible future. And by living you proved to them that their tampering with time is tampering with their own past. They've got to find you, find what has gone wrong with their own records. I know it sounds crazy but—can you understand?"

"I couldn't have until lately," he said quietly. "Since I met you and found the gateway and got sick I've had a lot of time to think and to—speculate. *They* represent the future of Earth?"

She nodded. "At first, when mother and I found them, it was like a fairy tale—a trip into the past. Mother was a governess with the Tewkesburys, you know. She met Dad one summer and, though she was never happy living with him she stuck it out on account of me. I was playing in the cellar one day—I was still a little girl—when the gateway was made.

"They needed a connector with our world in our time," Belinda went on. "They have incredible machines but they were running out of raw materials

—they only need a little of anything to transmute. Silver, iron, things like that, raw metals or easily unalloyed ones. They paid well—but it wasn't the money. It was, to Mother, a return to a world she had always longed for and never really known.

"And of course it killed her." Belinda rubbed the side of her bronze head against his shoulder. "They took care of her—and they were able to immunize me to the deadly radiations of their world. Then they made me their connector for Shoreside—just as Lucia is connector here in Capri. It gave me something to live for."

"But slightly unreal," he suggested. "And then I had to come home with my crying towel and bust everything up."

"I'm glad you did," she said fiercely. "If you hadn't I might never have waked up. You see, they're different, somehow—insulated. You were righter than you know when you called them unreal. Even their emotions. They cannot die except through accident—so they cannot even permit themselves violence. They stay bottled up in their ridiculous masquerade."

"But what will happen to the world—our world?" he asked. "What has happened to theirs that *they* alone should survive?"

"I don't know the full story," she said. "I never asked. Somehow they don't encourage curiosity."

He felt the firm softness of her in the curve of his arm, looked into the warmth and desire and beauty of her face. He checked the sails and then, deliberately locked the tiller. He said, "Darling, this isn't exactly a steam yacht. But I don't think I can wait. . . ."

She said softly, "I've been waiting a very long time, darling."

Lawford laughed and kissed her and enjoyed the saltiness of it and wondered what it would be like to kiss this woman away from the sea. And then he said, "I wish we could turn off the moon."

And she said, "I know—but just now I feel like being an exhibitionist."

VII

BELINDA was lying close beside him in the cockpit, tracing the outline of his lips with a gentle forefinger, when the motor sounded faintly, a mere thrum in the distance. Somehow, without words, both of them knew. They lay there tensely, listening as it grew steadily louder, a thread of sound becoming twine, then cord, then rope, then hawser. They kissed finally, despairingly, and then Lawford was on his knees, tugging the automatic loose from a pocket of his discarded jacket, checking the safety, the extra clip.

"Stay low and mind the tiller," he told Belinda. "I'll do what I can with this." He held up his hand-weapon.

"Brief honeymoon," said Belinda, kneeling beside him. She shook back her hair, ran her hands through it, said, "Damn that Lucia."

"Double in spades," he replied, peering toward the twin wedges of white foam that represented the bow of the motor launch speeding toward them. He put a hand on her shoulder, squeezed hard, pushed her down, said, "I don't want anything to happen to you."

He felt the familiar tightening of muscles over his stomach, the faint taste of copper at the base of his tongue, that were a prelude to action. The sensations he had first felt before the opening kickoffs of school football games, that he had known more closely during the war in the Pacific under Kamikaze attack.

"Better than nothing—a hell of a lot better," he said to Belinda in delayed response to her "brief honeymoon" remark. He felt the pressure of her fingers about his left wrist, then their withdrawal. She had understood him as usual.

But his attention was on the approaching boat. Another few seconds would bring it alongside and whatever he did would have to be done then. His only hope, he decided, was to attempt to put a slug or two into her carburetor or distributor as she swept close, thus leav-

ing her to wallow in the Mediterranean swell while he and Belinda slid away to safety under sail.

He figured they had about one chance in twenty of making it. After all, he didn't even know where the engines were. And they might have auxiliary drive. He decided one in fifty was more like it. Still, he intended to try.

Their pursuers cut power fifty yards away and the foam at her bows subsided. A woman's voice—Lucia's—sounded clear across the narrowing margin of water. "Don't do anything foolish," she warned them.

Lawford waiting, still crouched, the pistol ready in his right hand. Then, as the launch came abreast of them he stood up, planning to locate the engine or engines with one quick survey in the moonlight, then to wreak what damage he could.

A searchlight went on suddenly, blinding him. He heard Lucia laugh as he fired blindly, uselessly. Then a blue cone leapt at him from somewhere, engulfed him, rendered him unable to move. So rigidly did it grip his muscles that a slight sway of the cockpit caused him to lose his balance. He would have fallen overboard face first had not Belinda caught him and held him close.

The most annoying part of the whole ignominious affair was that he remained perfectly conscious throughout. Briefly the boats were warped together and a villainous looking Caprian—even more piratical in appearance than Ernesto—picked him up like a sack of meal and lifted him into the launch. Lucia, clad in a remarkable sweater and apparently little else, told Belinda crisply to follow him aboard. Then they were heading back to the island.

Thanks to the launch's powerful motors they made it in mere tens of minutes. Lucia was scornful at their escape effort. She said in her fluent slightly-accented American-English, "You shouldn't have put me to so much trouble, you crazy mixed-up kids."

Belinda, holding Lawford's immobile

head in her lap, said, "What have you done to Martin? Can't you release him?"

And Lucia laughed. "I'd be as foolish as the pair of you if I did," she countered. "No, both of you are wanted. Why you I don't know"—this to Belinda—"but your Martin, yes."

"What are you going to do to him?" Belinda asked.

"I shan't hurt him, never fear," replied the golden blonde. "As to what Luigi will do—" She broke off eloquently. "You know what comes first with him."

FEELING unpleasantly like a plump turkey on Thanksgiving eve, Lawford listened and looked at what came within his range of vision. They were taken around to the other side of the island, under a cliff he recalled noting during his earlier sails. Apparently a boathouse had been built ingeniously out of a grotto in the cliff itself.

Lawford was hoisted up by the sailor and carried along a corridor cut out of the bedrock of the island to a chamber that was unmistakably a basement. "Welcome to my home," Lucia said mockingly. She dismissed the boatman with a burst of fluent Italian. Then, when he had gone, she operated a lever and, seconds later, a door opened in the wall itself. Under Lucia's orders Belinda helped lug him through the curtain of darkness—into a sort of colonnade in the cliff through whose pillars the moonlit Mediterranean glowed darkly.

She spouted Italian into a voice-tube of some kind in the inner wall, then turned to Lawford and aimed an odd weapon at him. Before Belinda could stop her another cone of blue light engulfed him and he found himself once more in control of his muscles.

"What the hell did you do to me?" Lawford asked Lucia.

"Sorry, beautiful," the girl told him, devouring him with her eyes. "It was risky—for us. But Carlo is a dumb ox, born of a hundred generation of oxen.

He won't talk. I used one of our weapons on you—a muscular restrictor."

Lawford frowned. "A paralysis beam," he said, then went to Belinda. "Are you all right, honey?" he asked.

"Oh yes," she replied. "But you . . .?"

"Fine—now," he told her. "How do we get out of here?"

"You don't," said Lucia, stretching lazily and regarding them insolently as she leaned against a wall. Then regarding their glum expressions, "Oh come now—it's not as bad as all that. Have our mutual friends ever done you any real harm, Linda? You know better."

"They're hurting me now," she replied fiercely. "They're hurting Martin, hurting us, denying us our freedom."

"You crazy mixed-up Americans," said Lucia softly. Then, "Here come the men."

A lean, handsome, graceful man of indeterminate age and unmistakably aristocratic cast of feature entered, clad only in brief bathing trunks, save for heavy metal bracelets on either wrist.

Behind him, wearing full Edwardian regalia, came the man known as John whom Lawford remembered vividly from his first visit through the Shore-side gateway. They regarded Lawford curiously and then John and Luigi questioned Lucia in Italian too rapid for Lawford to follow. All he could catch was his own name and Belinda's.

Then Luigi turned to Lawford and Belinda and smiled unexpectedly and said, "You must be hungry. I think we should breakfast before we go to work."

Breakfast was Lucullan beyond any meal in Lawford's experience. Yet, despite the long and arduous night through which he had just passed, he could muster little appetite. He was far too worried about the immediate future. Yet, like a man who believes himself to be suffering from a deadly ailment and fears to see a doctor lest his fear be confirmed, he did not dare ask what lay in store for them. Nor, apparently, did Belinda. A miserable meal.

When it was finished Luigi rose and

said, "Mr. Lawford, please come with me." He walked rapidly from the room.

"Come along," said the man known as John when Lawford showed no disposition to follow. And something beneath the politeness of his tone suggested that disobedience might be unpleasant.

Lawford bent to kiss Belinda briefly and went. This, he felt, was probably it. It might prove painless, he decided, but it could hardly be pleasant—whatever lay in store for him.

Compared to the other chambers of the cliff-villa which he had seen the room to which he was taken was strangely gaunt. He was asked to sit in a chair in its center and given a cigarette. His captors, also smoking, sat watching him and chatting.

"You represent a major problem," the man known as John said thoughtfully. "Thanks to your survival after being exposed to the radiation of Shoreside Globe, you're a living proof that folk from your time-plane can come through to ours and survive. Would you mind telling me how?"

"As much as I can," said Lawford. He saw little sense in withholding such meager information about his cure as he possessed. They listened and then John asked to see the capsules Commander Johnson had given him.

He blinked at them, offered them to Luigi, said, "These will be returned to you, of course—we are not cruel people. But for a little while we need them for examination and testing."

"Just who and what are you—and what is your world?" Lawford asked. His impressions till then were fragmentary to put it mildly.

"You might call us survivors on a ruined Earth," said the man called John. "The story is far from pretty though we have done what we could to make its conclusion not unpleasant."

IT WAS a story of war that had made the globe uninhabitable—of fission bombs and bacteriological cultures that

had destroyed virtually all mankind. "But a few of the folk with means were able to manage," he concluded. "We were able to construct shelters—what we now call globes. Shoreside is one of them, this is another. There are others in America, in England, in South America.

"We number but a thousand or so," he went on. "Thanks to the science that ruined our world we are virtually immortal. But we have no children. In each globe we try to live the period which represented the peak of civilization in its geographical location. In Shoreside it is 1911—here it is 1949. In Casa del Mar Globe in Chile it is 1988—they had an amazing final flowering of culture and comfort there. In England it is Regency—and very naughty and very dull. But all of them grow dull with time. Which is why we visit one another frequently, seeking variety of period and people."

"Then space-travel was never attained?" Lawford asked.

The man known as John shrugged. "The final war came just too soon," he said. "The ships were all but built. Unmanned flights had been made to and around the moon, around Mars and Venus. But there was not quite time. . . ."

"I should think you would try it yourselves if the boredom is that severe," said Lawford.

The other shrugged again and replied wearily, "How can we? It takes science and daring for such an enterprise. We—we are the rich. We have neither."

"What are you going to do with us?" Lawford asked.

The man called John smiled reassuringly. "Nothing drastic unless you force us to," he said. "Linda served us well while the Shoreside Gateway was open. And what you have done is scarcely your fault. Besides, we shall have to study you. We shall keep you with us." He paused and added with a trace of irony, "I hope you shan't find it hopelessly un-

pleasant." He got up. "Now, if you please. . . ."

"You mean I'm finished—you're through with me?" Lawford asked.

"For now," said the man known as John. "You have been sitting under examination beams that will tell us all we need know about you. You have the run of the place, of course."

Lucia awaited him back on the cliff gallery. She said, "I'll show you around while they test Linda." She had discarded her sweater in favor of the Bikini beneath. She was, he thought, a magnificent little animal. If it weren't for Belinda. . . He felt himself redden with shame, caught a glimpse of mockery in Lucia's darting black eyes.

But she seemed to be biding her time as she escorted him about the shelter that had survived planetary ruin. Deep in the cliff were the machines that kept its force-shield in operation—for it was a globular shield a thousand meters in diameter, she told him. They looked incredibly simple—mere banks of stainless steel with occasional dials or knobs or gauges to mark their working. Here were, she told him, food synthesizers, shield energizers, repair robots, everything needed to support life for a near-eternity.

"We derive most of what we need from the seawater," she said. "Occasionally, however, something else is needed—which is where I come in. Where your Linda came in as a connector with our world."

"How is the connection made?" he asked. "I've always thought time-travel an impossibility."

"It is, I guess," she replied with a shrug. "Lord, I'm no scientist, Martin. But there is a time-spiral and the gateways cut through them. It's a dimensional process. That's all I can tell you."

"Why don't these people just come through themselves?" he asked, frowning, as they emerged on cliff-top into a pearly morning.

"I used to wonder myself," said Lucia. "But they have their reasons. In the

first place, to them, our time with its low-radiation pattern is as deadly as theirs is to most of us. But they can handle that. Their chief fear is of being discovered. It would mean destruction of their entire lives. Can't you see it?"

Lawford could. If awareness of the gateways became general he could imagine what would happen. Security on either side of the Iron Curtain would simply take over for the sake of the inventions of future science that kept the globes alive: Force-shields, near-eternal life, synthesizers. . . He saw all too clearly.

"That's why we have to keep you here," she told him. And a flickering glance of her dark eyes informed him she was not sorry.

They passed other decorative men and women, all lean, all incredibly healthy, in the rooms and corridors of the villa and in the half-dozen others that comprised the colony. About two-thirds of the globe's interior was land, the rest water. Like the Shoreside Globe, it was designed on an amazingly luxurious scale.

THE tour wound up on a strip of gleaming silver beach, where Lucia removed the wisps of bathing suit she wore and joined other naked sun-bathers, said, "Do what you wish. Linda will be here soon."

She joined him and they took off their suits and became like the others. There was a sensual weariness in the atmosphere that frightened him a little. The thought of these spoiled selfish people, thus confined with their every physical and material wish gratified, lacking any intellectual stimulus, was appalling.

"Why do they go on?" he asked Belinda softly.

"Because they're afraid to die," she replied.

"We've got to get out of here," he whispered. "We've got to get out and go somewhere they can never find us."

"They won't give us the chance," she

said hopelessly. Then, with a smile, "But we'll always be together anyway."

"Of course, darling," he replied, resting a hand on her bare shoulder. But beyond Belinda he caught Lucia regarding them mockingly. And he wondered how long it would take boredom to do its insidious work on their love.

They ate another meal after a while and then John came and told them, "We're flying to Shoreside. Come along. Oh, Lawford—here." He handed over the packet of capsules from Bethesda, added, "Interesting. Your people are coming along faster than we expected." The thought seemed to bother him for some reason.

They rode motor scooters to the inland depth of the globe, where what appeared to be a small mound developed into a hidden hangar. Taking his hand Lucia led him through a small doorway into a circular cabin, where the man called John sat down before a simple looking dashboard. He pressed three successive buttons, lit a cigarette, said over his shoulder, "Make yourselves comfortable," and relapsed into a sort of coma.

The cabin was comfortable and Lawford wondered when they were going to take off. He asked and Belinda replied, "Oh—we're on our way now." She pressed a button on a separate instrument panel.

A strip of opaque material that circumnavigated the cabin just beneath its soft ceiling came alive. Here were the stars, here was the Earth perhaps a hundred kilometers below them.

It was a terrifying Earth, utterly unlike the simulated weather of the globes. It was a world as desolate as the moon itself, a world of shining clouds, driven across its night surface by never-ending gales, a world of dead dark land and glowing waters. It was a world utterly destroyed for human habitation.

"It's frightening, isn't it?" Belinda said softly.

He nodded, thinking how simple the girl really was now that he understood,

or partially understood, the conditions of her remarkable life. What had appeared baffling to him back in the old house at Shoreside was merely a protective shell, mercifully not as effective, where he was concerned, as the force-shields that enabled the globes to exist.

"Even the winds shine at night," she said softly, wonderingly.

The atomic rocket landed under full automatic control at Shoreside in a little less than two hours. Harry Morton was there to greet them with dusters for Belinda and Lawford. He drove them to the old Lawford mansion, still intact in this continuum, in an ancient Locomobile touring car whose top was held in place by a pair of leather straps attached to the inside of the front mudguards.

"So you're with us from now on—both of you" Morton said genially, exuding an aroma of good whisky and fine tobacco from beneath his neatly trimmed guardsman's mustache. He appeared friendly—yet he looked at Belinda covertly in a way that reminded Lawford unpleasantly of the way in which Lucia had regarded himself.

The six weeks that followed were a strange honeymoon for a couple not even married. Lawford and Belinda sported in the smooth globe-water or sought such seclusion as they could find, along the beach and in the gardens behind it.

VIII

AT FIRST they were troubled by the people, who sought to include them in the community. They were pleasant, these survivors of a ruined world. Prisoned together in their survival globes, condemned to near-eternity with one another, they had the single morality of non-violence. Bored, sterile, they were utterly promiscuous, promiscuous without desire or purpose.

Naturally they sought to include Belinda and Lawford in their revels. But when the young people proved indiffer-

ent they shrugged and left them alone. They knew what would happen under the erosion of time—and they could afford to wait.

It frightened Lawford. One day, close to the northern end of the beach, he said, "Darling, what sort of girl were you before you met me? Here in this world, I mean?"

She dropped her green eyes and said, "I was—a little like the rest of them. But not after you came back. Then, I couldn't. Then, I was so happy not to be one of them really, so glad I could break away."

"And then I had to foul it up by blundering in here and wrecking the gateway," he said ruefully.

"In a way I'm glad," she replied, touching him. "Otherwise you'd never have understood. And I haven't—well, I've been true since the night you took me to dinner. I'll always be true."

"Always is a long time," he told her, thinking of the constant current of temptation that flowed around them.

"I think I may have a reason," she whispered fiercely.

He looked at her questioningly and she nodded imperceptibly. "You mean you're pregnant?" he asked. "But that's impossible."

"If I'm not I'm giving a good imitation," she told him. Then, seeing the horror in his face, "Darling, what's wrong?"

"This place—the conditions," he told her. "How would you like to bring up a child into this." He gestured at the globe about them. "And how do you know it would be a child—if it lived? Remember, you and I have got radiation records."

He wished he had not been so brutally frank when he saw her face crumple—but the news had been too shocking, his reaction too swift for persiflage. He managed a smile, however, and held her wrists and said, "It's probably just a false alarm."

"I didn't think," she whispered. "I was so amazed, so happy—"

"You," Lawford told her, "are an absolute doll. Let's get back to the room and ready for dinner."

Capri was coming to visit again that evening. There had been other visits—from Casa del Mar, from Torquay, from Melbourne—during their stay. The parties were strange affairs—even stranger than Lawford had thought the night he destroyed the gateway.

For this world of globes was a world without servants. The music, despite the semblance of a screened orchestra, was canned, the drinks automatically provided. Everything was synthesized, done by machines. Lawford, always thinking of escape, tried to understand how they operated, but his hosts couldn't or wouldn't tell him. He suspected that they lacked the knowledge.

Nor were he and Belinda allowed to leave Shoreside. He had wondered a little at this confinement, decided it was because, with the gateway destroyed, the Jersey resort offered them no chance to return to their own world and time. It had seemed absurd—for who would believe them if they tried to report their experiences?

NOW, walking back to the house that had once been his, Lawford found himself in the grip of frightening suspicion. The leaders of this strange group of survivors might not be educated—but they were phenomenally astute. Sterility was the bane of their existence. What if he and Belinda *were* guinea-pigs, were being tested to see if the ability to breed might not be restored.

It was not a pleasant thought.

And it was unpleasantly confirmed that evening when, after the arrival of the guests from Capri, John and Luigi called him into the billiard room and John said, "Afraid I'll have to ask you for another look at those capsules of yours, old man."

"Afraid I've used them all up," lied Lawford.

"Afraid you haven't," John told him

amiably. Then, less amiably, "We've been watching you and Linda, you know—closer than you've suspected, I fear. You understand, a matter of necessity."

"My coming back made a change, didn't it?" Lawford asked.

John and Luigi exchanged a significant glance. The Italian—he had been a Papal prince once, Lawford had learned—said, "You seem to understand, a little, Martin. Is your young lady aware?"

"She's aware," said Lawford grimly, wondering by what concealed testing device they had found out.

"It makes the devil of a difference," Luigi said. "We tested Lucia as well—and her condition is interesting. I believe that's the word. You have cost us a lot Martin. Now is your chance to repay us—with interest."

"Have you tried any of your own women?" Lawford asked.

Their eyes fell away. It was John who replied, "Hardly. They—it has been so long—it could not be done. But with women of your time. . . ."

"Aren't you afraid of rewriting your own past?" Lawford asked.

"That is the chance we must take," said Luigi quietly. "It is already too late for worry on that score. You rewrote it when you failed to die after your first exposure. Our history is already falling away from us. And we feel the need of children."

"Your women won't like it," said Lawford.

"But they will," Luigi told him. "They will be glad to accept the children as their own, glad to avoid the discomfort of child-bearing. We must have the capsules for further synthesization."

"Why should they do the trick?" asked Lawford.

"It is not certain," Luigi replied frankly. "However, your exposure and cure at Bethesda was handled with recovery of fertility in mind. It would not have been effective in your own time. Here, in our poor world, it works—for the males and females alike. Once we have produced

actual offspring we can mate normally with women from your world. We can, perhaps, return discreetly to an Earth that is no longer destroyed."

"You wouldn't like it," said Lawford.

"Don't be too sure of that," said John. "Remember, we have in our world devices which will ensure us both riches and power—and we can always return to our globes should life prove too difficult on your continuum. We ought to be able to reshape the past in such a way as to allow us a far less restricted future."

LAWFORD looked at them and thought—if they were successful, and under the stimulus of regained fertility he saw nothing to stop them, they might very well reshape his own world, his own world and Belinda's. Certainly they had resources for which his government would go into hock, resources that would offer total victory in the Cold War.

And, knowing them, he knew what they would expect in payment. They would sterilize where they wished, alter populations into servant castes, turn the world into a groaning playground for themselves. And if the world revolted they could destroy it and retreat to the shelter of their force-shields across the time-gap.

He said, "I'll get you the capsules."

He found Belinda chatting with the mustachioed Philip by the punchbowl, signaled her with his eyes. In a gown of pale pink satin with green metal lace, she was glowingly lovely. But she came, anxious, at his silent summons.

"Wait for me on the terrace," he told her softly, then ran up the stairs to his room, to where the capsules were concealed. He got them, put the packet in his evening trouser pocket, ducked through the window and climbed down the stout vine that clung to the wall of the mansion. Belinda was awaiting him outside.

"What's wrong?" she whispered.

"We've got to get rid of these damned pills," he told her, led her rapidly toward the beach. His intention was to

crush each capsule, throw it out into the water. He knew they would have little time, explained as best he could while they walked southward diagonally toward the beach across the lawn. "If only I hadn't destroyed the gateway!" he murmured.

They had barely reached the sand when floodlights went on around the house. Belinda gasped and Lawford swore and they raced on, as best they could in their confining clothes, seeking deeper shelter. Behind them they heard sounds of alarm and Lawford expected at any moment to see and be enveloped by the blue cone of a paralyzer.

Panting, stumbling, they reached the barrier. And then Lawford, moving along it hopelessly, felt one of his feet sink into the sand close to the turf behind it. He pulled clear with a sucking sound, realised his foot was wet. And he recalled this spot from his lone bewildered walk the night of his second visit.

It was bigger than before and, where it met the barrier, wetter. He grabbed Belinda, said, "We're probably going to die but it's our only chance." And with a savage gesture he ripped off her magnificent satin Edwardian evening gown. "Get the rest of them off," he ordered and began to rip off his own clothes. A blue cone, well down the beach, was played aimlessly along the sands.

Stripped to his shorts he lowered himself into the hole in the sand. Somehow he could hear sounds of surf that were alien to the shelter globe. He felt the bottom fall away beneath him, took a deep breath and grabbed for Belinda and pulled her in beside him—just as a flicker of deadly blue light swept across the spot where she had been crouched.

It was briefly, savagely, like being caught in a cross-rip where the tides raced between two islands, a Scylla whirlpool. He felt his lungs about to burst, felt himself carried helplessly away, lost his clutch on Belinda's body.

Then he broke to the surface, looked up. If the clouds swirled and glowed

above him they were doomed. But the clouds were white and stately as aged sheep, picking their way around the moon. Belinda's head came clear and she gasped and sputtered in the surf. They struck out slowly toward the shore. Lawford found himself holding a soggy packet in one hand and let it drop into the water. At least he hadn't left the pills behind him.

They stood on the beach and looked at each other stupidly, exhausted, panting. And then Belinda said with a giggle, "This is going to be hard to explain."

"We'll tell them somebody stole our boat," said Lawford. In soaked Edwardian underwear they walked slowly along the sand and he said, "What does this new gateway mean, honey?"

"I don't know," she replied. "But thank you, darling—thank you for finding it. Are we really in our own world?"

"We're on it," he said. "But I've got a hunch *their* shelters must be breaking down. That gap in the force-field could mean the end if my guess is right."

"Poor lost folk," said Belinda. She shuddered though the night was warm.

IT was embarrassing—but once they were identified it was all right. They made up a cock-and-bull story about having married in Capri and wishing to return to the place of their first meeting by boat in the moonlight, only to meet with near disaster when their rented boat sank.

Lawford told another story to Security, of course. To his surprise they didn't laugh at him. They didn't say they believed but they were willing to check. Capri and Torquay were watched and Lucia Zenaro was picked up a few weeks later. Under drugs her story confirmed much of Lawford's tale. And she was undeniably pregnant.

Belinda was not—not after the physical shock of her escape. Mercifully, it proved, when Lucia's baby was born. The baby came at night. It did not live more than a few hours. But it shone in the dark. ● ● ●



Illustration by KELLY FREAS

*It would be hard to
convince Violet that the
human race deserved . . .*

ONE MORE CHANCE

By JAN SMITH

VIOLET MASON was sitting at her desk quietly now; all the terror and grief had flowed out of her during the three days she had done nothing but lie on her cot and sob, sobbed as she had never sobbed before in all her thirty-eight years. Now she just sat quietly, a tall thin woman with pale blond hair and thin aristocratic features. Occasionally her eyes would wander to the mirror that hung on the concrete wall, the only piece of adornment in the little combined office and sleeping room. As her pinched-nosed, narrow-lipped face looked back at her, she turned quickly away to rest her eyes on the steel door of the room.

"There's no use looking away," she

told herself, "it's the only human face you'll ever see; you had better get used to it. The last woman on earth—me! My God, what a joke!" She felt the surge of returning hysteria, crowding upward to seize hold of her precarious sanity. Hurriedly she got up. Perhaps if she moved around, did anything but just sit there and stare at her own face and the silent, silent radio.

Quickly she crossed the room and throwing open the door went out into the huge, steel-beamed, windowless room beyond. It was a room in which massive pillars and concrete walls supported a bunker-like ceiling. The slapping of her own low cut shoes on the red linoleum floor sent shivers up and down her spine. She talked to herself trying to calm her panic.

"The footsteps of the last human echo through the silence of a dead world. But they're such sensible shoes, how can they make such a ghastly noise? Sensible! Damn sensible! That's why you're here . . . alone!"

Slowly, to cut down the echo of her footsteps, Violet began to walk around the room.

"I've got to do something; I've got to quit thinking," she told herself as she picked up a feather duster and started to dust the hundreds of objects that lined the walls or sat about the room. The old photographs, the slouch hats, the faded gray uniforms, the crossed muskets and the swords. Hanging above all were the flags; all the once splendid regimentals flapping so gently in the soft air of the ventilators, nodding together like aristocratic old men dreaming of the brave old days.

All about her were the memories, the faded but still fragrant memories of the South, the South that she loved and to which she had devoted her life. All of the old glory had been so carefully gathered here in this bomb and radiation proof, gas sealed building. The building built with money donated by hundreds of members of the Southern Daughters to preserve the memories of the old War

for future generations. Of course, now there would be no future generations but the memories were still here and the building that had been built with such loving care was still intact. The South itself was gone, but its museum was intact with its built-in, self-operating power plants, its air purifying units and its 10,000 watt radio station.

FOR a moment the thought of the radio almost sent her hurrying back to her office; perhaps if she tried once more . . . but there had been nothing, no response to her frantic attempts to contact other possible survivors. The air had been silent, as silent as the city of Fredericksburg itself. Outside, the radioactive dust and the nerve gas were whipped about by the cyclonic storms that the H-Bombs had started. For a moment she let herself remember the last broadcast she had heard, the last human voice she would ever hear. It had been a man in New Jersey talking about the destruction of New York; the raining hell-bombs, the fire storms that had swept across Manhattan Island. Then that station had gone off the air like all the rest and there had been nothing, nothing but the loneliness and a building that had been built to outlast the pyramids, that had withstood the bombs and had kept out the completely contaminated air. Nothing left but memories of an older time when war had been a little kinder, nothing left but memories and Violet Mason, the Curator of the Fredericksburg Confederate Memorial. Violet finished her dusting and dropped down in a huge chair that had belonged to Robert E. Lee.

"Alone. All alone. But I've always been alone. If only I . . . if I'd been married perhaps we both would have been here when the war started and I wouldn't be all by myself."

She hadn't been bad looking and she had always dressed well in those days before Great-Aunt Thomas had lost her money. There had been quite a few men

who had been interested, but somehow none of them had been just right. One or two hadn't been tall enough to suit her, another had belonged to the wrong branch of the Baptist church, others had been from families that weren't quite right—decent enough people, but not really on the level of the Masons of Virginia.

"You're young yet," Aunt Thomas had said, "a girl with your background can afford to wait until the right sort of man comes along."

So she had waited, wrapped up in her work as historian and Curator of the Southern Daughters, wrapped up in their work to recapture the ideals of the Old South from the Socialist leveling doctrines that were so widespread. She had waited and written her books and pamphlets, had made her broadcasts on Southern Culture and the Spirit of Southern Decency from the radio here in this same building. She had waited and then one day she had been thirty-five and not very pretty anymore. She didn't remember being thirty-four or thirty-three, but suddenly she was thirty-five and frightened of being alone. Great-Aunt Thomas was old and she had no one else really close. She had been so frightened that for a while she had almost gone out of her way to meet men. And then there had been Tony without her quite knowing how; Tony who was big and very handsome. That one night she had really let him kiss her, kiss her as no man ever had before. She felt the blood rush to her face even now just thinking of it. His demanding, insistent lips had briefly turned her blood into pounding rivers of liquid fire. It hadn't been much later that Cousin Annie Mason had learned that Tony had Italian grandparents. Imagine the nerve of him! Wanting to marry a Mason, a Mason of Fredericksburg, mind you. My, hadn't they cut him after that! He had just ceased to exist as far as the Masons were concerned.

Violet then had been thirty-six and Aunt Thomas had been dead for six months and there hadn't been any money at all. Mrs. Spencer-Lewis, Past-President of the Southern Daughters, had been so kind—pretending that she didn't know that the last of the Masons no longer had a home, pretending that the Museum Committee had decided that for the safety of the precious relics it was necessary for the Curator to live in the tiny apartment in the building.

THEN the war had come and she had been alone in the building, alone and too frightened to go out. She had heard the bombs and listened to the radio stations until one by one they had gone off the air. Even the noise of the bombs had stopped and there had been no sound save the low muttering of the generators that were keeping the air supply pure and the lights on. Tony DeLong had married that little Theda Summers fluff and was living—she tried to stop the thought but it came—*had been* living. He was as dead as the rest of them; Tony with his dark wavy hair and his strong arms was gone and so was the woman he had married. So was Cousin Annie Mason and Mrs. Spencer-Lewis and all the Southern Daughters. All were gone and she was so very lonely that she sobbed out to herself, "I'll never hear another human voice."

Two minutes later she did hear one; somewhere in the building a man was speaking.

"My God!" Violet's hands went to her face. "There's been someone here in the building all the time!"

Fear, surprise and joy fought for control of her mind. Suddenly she knew . . . the radio! She had left it on. She was running toward the broadcasting room, her breath coming in great gasps of relief.

"Hello. Hello. Is there anyone on this band? Hello. Answer please. Can anyone hear me?" A man's quiet voice was repeating time after time, "Hello. This is Washington, D. C. calling. Is

there anyone on this band. Answer please. . . ."

Violet was into the broadcasting studio and fumbling with the microphone of the two-way sending set.

"Is there anyone alive out there. Answer. This is James Henderson, Major, U. S. Army, calling on band Able Dog 23489. Is there anyone. . . ."

The two-way set was unfamiliar to Violet. It had almost never been used. She couldn't get the set on; frantically she pulled at switches and pressed buttons while crying into the still dead microphone, "Yes! I hear you! Hello! Jim Henderson I hear you! *Hello!*" The power tubes were glowing now.

"I am now signing off on this circuit. This is Major James Henderson. Maybe I'm the last man alive, maybe not. This is Washington, D. C. I am switching channels, but will return to this circuit at approximately 0100 tomorrow. Signing off."

"Major Henderson! Major Henderson!" Violet was screaming into the microphone as the power came on full. "Oh God, he's gone! He doesn't hear me!" She jerked frantically at the band control, fruitlessly changing from circuit to circuit.

Later when she was calmer, she could sit and think. After all, she wasn't really alone—not now. James Henderson was alive some place in Washington and she would get through to him the next time he came on the air.

"Zero One Hundred. Washington time. The time in Virginia is the same. Zero One Hundred? One of those silly Army things. He probably meant one o'clock, one o'clock this afternoon." She sat watching the hands of the clock.

At one thirty she was in tears and by four o'clock she had cried herself to sleep, still sitting before the microphone. On awakening, the truth suddenly occurred to her. "Zero One Hundred, Zero One Hundred. Oh . . . it must be, it has to be . . . one in the morning!"

For two hours she waited and hoped, her eyes on the radio. At five after one

there was whistling from the speaker and a voice.

"Hello. Hello. This is Washington calling. This is Washington calling. Is there anybody out there? Is this circuit as dead as all the others? Over."

WITH shaking hands Violet pulled the microphone nearer her lips and began to shout into it, "No! No! I'm here! I hear you! Oh, I hear you!"

"My God, is there someone there? You're getting too much feedback, I can't read you. Can you adjust your set? Can you lower your volume? Over."

"Yes! Yes, Major. I'm Violet Mason. This is Violet Mason. I'm alive. I'm in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Is there anyone else left at all?"

"Hello Violet Mason. Hello Violet Mason. This is Jim Henderson. I can read you fine now. I guess we're all that's left, Violet. I've known that Europe and Asia were gone. We really gave it to them those first few days; those hell-bombs—the helium bombs—were like miniature suns. It's a wonder we didn't blow the planet apart. Their hydrogen bombs weren't quite as effective. More of us might have pulled through if it hadn't been for the nerve gas."

"Oh. Major Henderson, are you sure? How about South America."

"Gone, too, Violet. It was only a little old three week war but they didn't miss a thing. I'm in an underground communications center near where they used to keep the Pentagon. South America's gone, Africa's gone. We're all there is Violet, so maybe you had better start calling me 'Jim' instead of Major Henderson."

"Hello, Jim. I've been so lonely that I've been ready to die. I was so afraid that I was the last human being left. I was so scared I don't think I could have stood this place much longer."

"Look, tell me about it! Do you have enough food and everything?"

She thought of the sacks of potatoes and shelves of non-perishable goods that

the Southern Daughters had provided for the Jefferson Davis Day picnic. "I've plenty of food, Jim, enough to last me for months. I haven't been eating much."

"Months, huh? That's good. It ought to be safe enough to go out in a few weeks."

Later, Violet went to bed to sleep peacefully for the first time in many nights; Jim promised that he would call her early next morning.

The next few days were filled with plans and discussions of how they would meet as soon as the Geiger counters with which Jim's underground shelter was equipped should tell them that it was safe to travel. It was all so wonderful, it was almost like when she had been a girl and had a steady beau calling on the phone every day. His cultured voice proved that he was well educated and a gentleman, in fact he sounded almost like a Southerner. Funny she had never thought to ask him where he was from, but their talks were always so full and so hurried. She could hardly wait to see him. She did so hope that he was tall (she was so tall herself) and broad shouldered with maybe just a touch of gray hair at his temples. Funny she didn't even know how old he was.

"The wonder of this, Vi . . . it screams through my mind . . . that two of us should have lived through it . . . should be preserved. Nature . . . God must have meant for us to go on. He isn't through with us yet. We aren't just some kind of an experiment that failed. There must be some meaning. With all of our hatreds and prejudices, there must be good in us somewhere, enough anyway that He wants to give us one more chance . . . to try again."

"I hadn't thought of it that way, Jim."

"Vi . . . how old are you?"

"Well really, Jim! I hardly think . . ."

"This is important, Vi. We've got to get together, we're all that's left. If we don't do something about it, this is the end of the trail for mankind."

SHE hadn't thought of it that way . . . mankind. With difficulty she tore her thoughts away from her own loneliness for a moment. Jim was always talking about mankind, never about himself.

"Well, Jim, I'm old enough to know better." The coquettishness of her voice surprised her.

"We've got to get together, Vi. We can't wait for the radiation to disappear. There's no telling what might happen to one of us."

"But how, Jim? What can we do?"

"Listen, Vi. The human race, the future, is more important than either of us but it depends on both of us. I went up to the surface this morning for a few minutes. The counter I took with me gave me a pretty good idea of how long I could take it. There's an armored car that was left in the garage on the next level when the rest of the guys pulled out. It would give me a certain amount of protection. I figure that with no traffic. I can make it down there in about two hours."

"But, Jim, the radiation. You didn't think it'd be safe for a few weeks yet."

"I've got some protective clothing, Vi, and the armor of the car will help. I'm no radiation expert but I think that with any luck and if I'm exposed to it for only two hours, I won't pick up a fatal dose."

"But . . . if anything happens to you . . . I'll be all alone!"

"Even if I did, even if it takes me longer and I do get too much, I've got to come there. It wouldn't take effect right away, not the amount that's left around now. There'd be time, we'd have a few weeks and then it wouldn't have to be all up with the human race, would it, Vi?"

"Jim, be careful. I can't bear the thought of being alone again."

"I've got to do it, Vi. It's just that . . . well . . . the human race is worth one more chance. I'll leave here at eight in the morning and burn up the roads."

"But, Jim, I—"

"If I can't get away in time, I'll call you. Otherwise I'm on my way. Now, tell me how to get to where you are."

VIOLET slept but little that night. She spent the evening tidying up her apartment and the rest of the museum. Jim would be surprised at the size of the building. That was another of the things she had forgotten to tell him about. Later she tried on every dress she owned, including a violently purple, low cut affair which she had bought in New York on a trip a year ago. She had never had any intention of wearing it and had bought it just to be able to say she had purchased something on Fifth Avenue. Standing before her mirror alone, the dress brought a blush to her face. The bare expanse of neck and shoulders! And the color! Purple made her skin look more sallow than ever. It almost made her look Oriental. Such a thought! How could a Mason of Fredericksburg look like anything but a lady, a Southern lady.

"Jim Henderson is just too presumptuous if he expects me to. . . . Why, we wouldn't even be married! Well, maybe we could hold some sort of ceremony of our own but not right away. He'll have to wait. How do I know that I want to marry him? I wonder if I ever told any man that I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man on earth? This dress won't do at all. How about that white one. I don't want him to think that I'm some sort of a hussy. What gave him the idea that we could just . . . well . . . just have children?"

She guessed he was right about coming here as soon as possible though. Something could happen to either one of them. The atomic power plant that gave her light and cleared the radioactivity from the air could get something wrong with it, just some little thing. Jim had trouble with his and had had to repair it. Suppose hers quit before he got here; he'd find earth's last woman gone the way of the rest of the human race. She pictured him coming into the building, down the elevator from the ground floor, shedding his radiation clothing and searching for her. He would stride from room to

room calling her and the smile on his face, a smile like Tony's, would change to a look of anxiety when he found her stretched out on her cot with her face flushed. She had always looked very well when Aunt Thomas had let her rouge her cheeks. Her face would be flushed with the effects of radiation poisoning and perhaps she would have on the white dress or, if she dared, her white negligee. As he came into the room, she would reach out her hand to him and say . . . something affecting . . . but brave . . . something like, "I'm afraid you're really going to be the last human being now, James."

And then it was morning and she was waiting and waiting, adjusting and readjusting the purple dress and waiting. A dozen times she thought she heard the elevator and jumped up from the big Robert E. Lee chair only to realize that it was only the whirring of the generators. At eleven o'clock he was an hour overdue. He must have run into trouble.

Then finally, at two o'clock, when she was in complete despair, there was a noise at the top of the elevator shaft. It had been five, no, six hours. She was running now, her feet flying across the room toward the elevator. The light was on, the elevator was coming down. Six hours, so much more than he had planned on, but for a few weeks she wouldn't be alone, she wouldn't be the last human being on earth.

She reached the elevator, the door was opening and the major was stepping out. He stood there for a moment not saying anything, just looking at her. James Henderson was tall, taller even than she had hoped. The major had broad, strong shoulders that filled his army blouse. He was aristocratically handsome with a little touch of gray hair at his temples. And Major James Henderson was a Negro.

For a moment Violet stared back at him, then took a step backward, laughter breaking from her lips.

"Dear God!" she gasped, "I am the last human being, after all!" ● ● ●



Mercury Is NOT Hopeless

By R. S. RICHARDSON

A prominent astronomer suggests we pay more attention to the first planet as a future stopping place in space

AS A site for future habitation no place in the solar system seems to be regarded as quite so inhospitable as Mercury. Already colonists are staking out claims on the moon while real estate on Mercury goes begging. Apparently even the hardiest writers find existence on Mercury too painful to contemplate. One finds characters holed up on Pluto or serving time on Triton but seldom indeed does Mercury serve as the scene of action.

About a year ago I did a television sequence which had some scenes laid on Mercury. Some readers may recall having seen it if they follow the adventures of Captain Video and the Ranger.

In the script, two characters were stationed on Mercury for the purpose of establishing a solar observatory. The machinations of the villain prevented them from doing much solar research during the two weeks the sequence ran; in fact, they spent most of their time watching for the supply ship that never came and in hurling imprecations back to earth via telescreen. But as their creator I was compelled to do some realistic thinking about Mercury as a site for human habitation, and came to the conclusion that Mercury is not a completely inimical planet for eventual human colonization! Certainly it would be an ideal spot for an observatory dedi-

cated exclusively to the study of the sun. (I can't think of any other reason for putting an observatory on Mercury.) But whether the planet will ever be of use to us in this respect would seem to depend entirely on one condition which is still in doubt. There is a big *if* involved in the Hermes deal.

First a few remarks about conditions on Mercury. There is more known about this planet than is generally supposed.

Mercury is so near the sun and moves so fast that it is hard to find in the sky although it occasionally becomes as bright as Sirius. There is a story (probably false) that Copernicus never saw Mercury during his entire life. Certainly the planet is a most elusive object. You have to know ahead just when and where to look if you expect to catch it after sunset or before sunrise. Best time to look is when the planet is at its greatest distance east or west of the sun. In case you are interested you should be able to see Mercury after sunset around February 13, June 9, and October 6 of 1954.

With a telescope equipped with circles you should be able to pick up Mercury without trouble in broad daylight, unless it happens to be too near the sun. By using a corograph, Bernard Lyot at the Pic du Midi was able to photograph Mercury when it passed in front of the sun's corona.

I have tried to see Mercury under similar conditions through a six-inch refractor with a monochromatic filter but without any luck. Astronomers generally prefer to observe Mercury during the day when it is high in the sky and the image not so disturbed by atmospheric tremors. Even at the best, however, Mercury is a discouraging sight. Usually it appears merely as a little brownish disk as blank as a newly swept sidewalk.

Yet markings have been seen occasionally on Mercury by a few astronomers who possess the patience to specialize in this type of work. It is popularly supposed that the study of the planets

is the most exciting field for research in astronomy, but let me assure you that such is not the case. Definite results are few and hard to get. You have to wait and wait and wait for that one moment of opportunity when the atmosphere calms down and you can really see something.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago it was generally believed that Mercury rotated in twenty-four hours, although Schiaparelli from observations made between 1881 and 1889 had concluded that the period of rotation was 88 days, and that the planet always kept the same side turned toward the sun. The long rotation period was confirmed by Antoniadi in the summer months of 1927, 1928 and 1929, using the 33-inch refractor of the observatory at Meudon. Clyde Tombaugh, the discoverer of Pluto, has told me that with the Lowell refractor under good conditions he has discerned markings on Mercury which resemble the dark seas on the moon and which scarcely move from day to day.

We can tell more about conditions on Mercury from the variation of its light with phase than from direct observations of the surface markings. The variations are similar to those exhibited by the moon. We would expect the moon to send us half as much light at half moon as when the disk is full.

In reality the moon sends us only a ninth as much. This is due to the multitude of shadows cast by the rough surface which greatly reduce the amount of light reflected. The same is evidently true for Mercury. The disk of the planet suddenly brightens up at full phase indicating a rough uneven surface. Also, the planet's low reflecting power suggests an irregular surface much like that of the moon.

The most puzzling markings observed on Mercury are the cloudlike formations which often extend over large areas of surface. These clouds which were discovered by Schiaparelli often appear as white streaks at the limb, or as a veil

over the dark areas, being more frequent on the evening rather than the morning side of the disk.

Antoniadi observed temporary, irregular, whitish streaks of cloud at the limb sometimes stretching for 3000 miles. The cloudy veils show all degrees of density, from the greatest rarefaction to an opacity so high as to obliterate dark areas of soil more than 2000 miles across. The opacity of the veil changes rapidly, so that a spot which was easily visible one day would be invisible the next, or vice versa. In particular a dark hooked marking near the equator which he named "*Solitudo Criophori*" was more often rendered invisible by veiling than any other. In Antoniadi's opinion the clouds of Mercury are much more frequent and more obliterating than those of Mars.

It is hard to understand how a planet like Mercury could have an appreciable atmosphere. According to the latest figures the velocity of escape from Mercury is only slightly less than that for Mars, but the higher temperature should greatly hasten the escape of an atmosphere from the former planet. The veiling on Mercury can not be due to clouds like those on the Earth, as water vapor would certainly have escaped, been frozen out on the cold side, or have been decomposed photochemically long ago.

Antoniadi attributes the veiling to particles of dust "raised by the violence of the winds above the gloom of the dark, scorched, and desolate surface." But wind necessarily implies the presence of something to blow which seems to me to leave us as bad off as before. The only gas that might reasonably be expected to form an atmosphere on Mercury is argon (A⁴⁰).

If the amount of potassium in the surface rocks of Mercury is the same as in the Earth then there might be a thin atmosphere of argon derived from the decay of the radioactive potassium isotope, K⁴⁰. The presence of such a gas cannot be detected by the spectro-

scope but there is a delicate test that can be made by comparing the degree of polarization of light from the center of the disk and the limb. Such measures have been made on Mercury by Dollfus, who finds evidence for an atmosphere about three-thousandths as massive as that of the Earth. Thus Mercury may have a thin atmosphere of argon with possibly a trace of Krypton and Xenon.

The seemingly fatal objection to establishing an outpost on Mercury is of course the terrific temperature. According to the thermocouple measures made by Nicholson and Pettit in 1925 the temperature of a point on Mercury where the sun is directly overhead—the "sub-solar point"—is 622° F when the planet is at its mean distance from the sun of 36,000,000 miles. These observations were made in broad daylight with the 100-inch telescope, one of the few times that instrument has ever been turned so close to the sun. (The night men claimed the shape of the mirror was ruined for a week afterward).

Knowing the temperature of the sub-solar point we can calculate theoretically the temperature at any other point on the illuminated disk. These temperatures are given in the accompanying table starting at the sub-solar point where the altitude of the sun above the horizon is 90° and going to the terminator where the sun is practically on the horizon at an altitude of only 1°.

TABLE OF TEMPERATURES

Altitude of Temp.		Altitude of Temp.	
Sun		Sun	
90°	622° F	5°	264° F
75	617	4	235
60	597	3	203
45	561	2	160
30	505	1	91
15	405	0	very low

The table shows that at a place on Mercury where the sun is only 3° above the horizon the temperature of the soil would be as high as the noon-day tem-

perature on the moon. Not unless we are within less than 1° of the terminator would the temperature be low enough so that a man could be expected to withstand it. On Mercury 1° at the center of the planet corresponds to 30 miles on the surface. To stray much more than 30 miles from the terminator would be extremely hazardous unless protected by special equipment.

IT SEEMS strange to think that the temperature on the other side of Mercury where the sun never shines is probably the lowest in the solar system. A recent estimate puts it at -414° F or within 45° F of absolute zero. The exact value depends upon the flux of radioactive heat from the interior.

Writers who have used Mercury as the locale for their stories have generally set up housekeeping near the terminator or "twilight zone." This is a definite misnomer. There is no place where conditions correspond to twilight on the Earth. The only expression we can properly use is the technical term "zone of libration," the region that is alternately in light and dark owing to the difference in the rates of rotation and revolution of the planet.

But even in the zone of libration you could not withstand the heat unless you spent most of your time underground. The trouble is the librations are so large that you would be in danger of being trapped in sunlight before you knew it, like a man isolated on a rock by the tide. Let us look more closely into the effects produced by libration which are so extreme on Mercury.

We have seen that the best observational evidence indicates that Mercury rotates on its axis in the same time that it revolves around the sun. This seems reasonable in view of the fact that if the planet were ever in a viscous state the solar tidal action would be highly effective in slowing down the rotation, and so lengthening the day. So let us take the period of rotation to be 87.9686 days, or exactly the same as the sidereal

period of revolution.

The point to notice is that the period of rotation is the same as the period of revolution only *on the average*. Mercury rotates at the uniform rate of 4.1° per day. But it does not revolve at a uniform rate. Its orbit is so eccentric that it moves much faster at perihelion than at aphelion. Thus when nearest the sun Mercury revolves at the rate of 6.2° per day, or 2.1° faster than it rotates. When at aphelion it revolves at the rate of 2.7° per day, or 1.4° slower than it rotates. On this account it is not quite right to say that Mercury always keeps the same face turned toward the sun.

Owing to the fact that the rate of rotation does not keep step with the rate of revolution, the planet seems to swing back and forth as it wheels around the sun. In one part of the orbit a portion of the eastern side will be brought into the illuminated zone and at another time a portion of the western side.

These librations would cause the sun to behave in a most peculiar way as seen by an observer on the planet. Let us suppose that Mercury is at the perihelion of its orbit. You are stationed on the equator at the terminator on the side of the planet that is advancing in space, the same as if you were on the dawn side of the Earth. We are going to make one more supposition: that the axis of rotation is perpendicular to the plane of the orbit. If you think of Mercury as an apple moving around on top of a table then its axis would be like a pencil stuck through the apple straight down into the table.

From your station you would see the sun on the horizon due east of you. Now when we see the sun in the east we naturally expect it to rise. But this time you would be fooled for instead the sun would sink until not even the corona was visible. Not until 44 days later when you had traveled around to aphelion would the sun show itself again.

The sun would rise straight up from the horizon until after 24 days it had reached an altitude of 24° . But instead

of continuing on across the sky it would turn around and head for the eastern horizon again! Twenty days later it would set and disappear for another 44 days.

NOW consider the changes in temperature as the sun comes up. Starting from some very low mark the temperature would rise rapidly until at the end of the first day it would be around 100° F. After four days it would be about 264° F and by another twenty days when the sun had reached its greatest altitude would be unbearable at about 465° F.

Now the sole purpose of establishing a station on Mercury is because it would afford us a superlative view of the sun. But at a point half-way within the zone of libration the temperature would be too much for us. Also, we would only be able to observe the sun for half a Mercurian year. And we would be in the region where the greatest changes in temperature occur, which would doubtless produce all sorts of complications in keeping the apparatus in running order.

If we try to avoid the heat by going farther in toward the night side the sun will be below the horizon more than half the time. But if we try to put the sun higher in the sky we will encounter impossible extremes in temperature. Imagine what an inferno the surface must be at the center of the illuminated disk! At perihelion the temperature must be so high that black rocks would be almost at red heat. The stars would be blotted out by the blinding glare from the huge white disk overhead. There would be no possibility of relief from its awful radiance. The sun would neither rise nor set but only swing monotonously back and forth across the sky like a giant pendulum bob beating out months instead of seconds.

As I see it, there are only two possible places on Mercury that are inhabitable and where the sun could also be observed continuously. These are the north and

south poles. And the poles would only be suitable if the axis of rotation is very nearly perpendicular to the plane of the orbit. If such turns out to be the case then we could put an observatory at one of the poles a few miles beyond the terminator. The sun would always be on the horizon and the temperature would always be about 95° F, a nice comfortable heat such as we enjoy in Pasadena from July to October. There would be no libration to bother us.

The sun would skim back and forth along the horizon, always remaining at the same altitude.

Now here is the best part of the story.

The observations indicate that the axis of Mercury is probably oriented in just about the way we have postulated. Schiaparelli found the axis to be nearly perpendicular to the orbit and Antoniadi believes that it must be within less than 7° of the vertical. Thus it is possible that nature has arranged matters so that there is a tiny space at the poles where men could exist in this most desolate of worlds.

One thing for which we should never lack on Mercury is an abundance of solar energy. Some miles farther within the illuminated region curved mirrors could be erected to focus sunlight onto pipes carrying mercury which upon being heated would drive a turbine coupled to an electric generator. With plenty of cheap power available perhaps the Hermes Observatory in time would become a fairly comfortable place to live and work.

The Chamber of Commerce could boast that their planet is the one in the solar system that is most affected by the distortion of space as predicted from the general theory of relativity. Every century the inhabitants of Mercury could declare a holiday to celebrate the fact that their line of apsides has advanced by 43" due to the irregularities in space which the planet has to buck as it journeys everlastingly around the sun.

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THE NAKED EYE

a novel by THOMAS BELL

Each of them lived in a world of his own

which science had built around them . . .



I

BLOBS covered humans and globs didn't; it was a distinction between personal privacy and public. Globs were geometrical prisms crowned with facets, one color all the way up, though which color was subject to adjustment. Privacy blobs were irregular freeforms, upstanding amoebae sprinkled lightly with patterns which reflected abstractly something of the wearer's emotions. All blobs differed from one another and therefore were much alike. This was the way it ought to be; snowflakes varied too, but it was hard to distinguish one from all the rest.

Hugh Bellamy glanced at the dark blue privacy blob across from him, an official from Traffic, but the rank was not discernible. The voice was flat and factual. "You were aware that it was a violation of the law?"

"It happened fast," said Bellamy. "I tried to help the man in the wreck before I thought."

"Even though you were not an ambulance attendant or wreck technician?" There was no sarcasm, merely a tonelessness which indicated that most citizens were childish and irresponsible.

"I knew I wasn't, but I could hear someone groaning even before I focused.

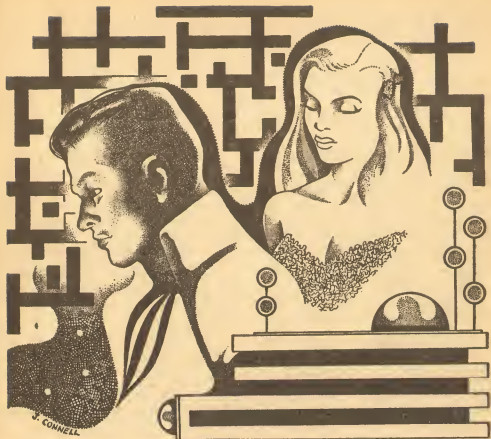


Illustration by JOSEPH CONNELL

I acted without thinking."

"You know our rules. It's our job to remove obstructions, and you've got to admit we're expert at it."

He did know the rules and it was true he hadn't been able to help since he couldn't see into the glob. But it hadn't seemed right to walk on without trying to do something.

"One man stops who shouldn't and he blocks two men behind him and the whole thing piles up," continued the official. "In a matter of minutes the pedestrian walk is frozen solid, nothing moving. Traffic flow is a serious business; if you stop it you endanger the entire

economic life of the community."

The official paused. "We'll get back to the charge against you in a minute. Now tell me what happened."

"When I saw the wreck it was yellow," began Bellamy.

"In the middle of the street?"

"No. After it crashed into the building in front of me."

"Thanks for the information," said the official.

Bellamy flushed, but the official couldn't see it, couldn't see his face nor anything else, knew only that he was an upright shapeless shape of—and he glanced to verify it—a light pleasing

blue, the true blue of probity and an easy conscience.

It was a foolish thing to say. A surface car at rest or moving slowly was always yellow. As it speeded up it changed to light green, dark green, and then shifted to red if it exceeded the limit.

It was a convenient arrangement that enabled the hovering Traffic detail to spot offenders miles away and helped drivers gauge their own speed in relation to others. The color change was a function of the glob attached to the surface car and was calibrated not only to the actual speed but to the zone. The same speed in various zones would produce different effects.

"I was walking to work when it occurred," continued Bellamy.

"How long does that take you?"

"Fifteen minutes."

"I see. You're twenty-four to thirty-two years old then."

The official was able to guess his age from the length of time it took him to get to work. Only older men with accumulated skill and seniority could afford to move away from the center of the city and waste hours driving. "Twenty-nine. Do you want the rest of it?"

"Not now. We've got your privacy power code and we'll get anything we need from that."

Bellamy hesitated. "I was walking along when the car left the regular lane and headed toward me. People behind me and in front scattered but I wasn't able to move. It hit the building a few feet away."

"What color was the car when it was on the street?"

"I told you I didn't notice."

"Did you hear the brakes?"

"I didn't. I was on nonhearing."

"Did you see anything else peculiar?"

HHE HAD, but it wasn't worth mentioning. A man was squeezed into a crevice where two buildings joined. Not that he knew it was a man, no one

could tell that when privacy was on. He had looked and there was a glow on the surface of the privacy shape, high, about eye level. The glow became more pronounced and broke through—he was able to see inside it. Swiftly the upper half of the field—it was a field which enclosed each person so that he could see without being seen—the field disintegrated and revealed the head and shoulders of a man.

His head was completely bald and the eyebrows were black and bushy and the face was screwed into some sort of an expression, what it was Bellamy couldn't tell because he wasn't good at guessing. And the man held a black rod, pointing it somewhere.

Altogether it was queer because the man was showing his face where everyone could see, deliberately it seemed. Should he mention this? No. It wasn't relevant. He wasn't the guardian of anyone's morals. Maybe he didn't see it, merely thought he had.

The next instant he'd turned and seen the car heading toward him. After it crashed he'd looked and noticed that it hadn't hit where the man had been. And the previously half disintegrated privacy blob was whole again, indistinguishable from all others on the street.

"I asked whether you saw anything peculiar because we roused the driver," said the official. "It was risky but we had to chance it. Accidents can't be tolerated. We've got to uncover the causes."

The official grunted. "He lapsed back into unconsciousness but before he did he said he'd swerved to keep from hitting a nude man who'd run into the street."

Bellamy stared at the dark blue shape. It was one time he wished he could see the official's face. Nude could mean two things: being without the privacy field, or going without clothes. Of the two, forgetting the privacy was the more incident.

Had the driver seen the same man?

Impossible. The man he'd been looking at was some distance from the roadway and when he'd turned his head the car was already out of control.

There was no connection, nevertheless he was uneasy. To bring it up now would look bad, as if he had something to conceal. It was better to let it slide.

"We'll have to wait until we can question the man again," said the official. "Since you can't tell us anything you can leave. And next time don't stop at accidents."

"You're not holding me?" It was a

him to distinguish the outline, but it didn't matter. The color established that it was an official of some sort.

"Personal Contact," said the shape.

At least it wasn't Traffic. "Hugh Bel-lamy," he said. "I'm supposed to call."

"We don't list cases by names. Give me your power code and I'll transfer you."

He gave it and waited until another shape came on. For all he knew it might have been the same person, though probably it wasn't. Again he gave the information.

Goldfish Bowl

EVER stop to think that in a world growing steadily more and more crowded, the most precious commodity of all will be privacy? In the world's great cities it is already a large and expensive undertaking to avoid the neighbors' curious eyes. With every inch becoming more and more competitive, it will be worse.

Where the solution lies, short of mass claustrophobia, we cannot say. But here is one man's ingenious solution for that craving to be alone—and the strange little complexes which trotted along in its wake.

—The Editor

relief to get up. Traffic violations could be serious.

"Why should we? We've got your privacy power code."

There wasn't any need to hold him—as long as he had to have power to run his privacy they'd know where to find him. But he had the uncomfortable feeling that there were other reasons for letting him go, something they weren't telling him.

AT HOME there was a record of a number to call. He stared at it. It wasn't anyone he knew, and they were very few. Who wanted him now? Traffic again? Maybe, but there was only one way to find out.

The screen seldom fulfilled the purpose for which it was intended but it was still the means of communication, cultural lag, no doubt. He dialed and a shape loomed on the screen, too close for

"We asked you to call because we've come to a decision."

He felt tired, as if he didn't care either way. "What is it?"

"Please. This must be discussed privately. You'll have to come down."

He couldn't see what wasn't already private about it, a closed screen circuit, numbers instead of names, no faces or personalities, nothing but two privacy shapes confronting each other across an unknown distance. "When do you want me?"

"Now if you can. There's no actual hurry, but we like to get our cases back into the file."

He completed the arrangements and hung up. He'd planned something else but it would have to wait. Preparing to leave he increased the power of his privacy—he'd turned it low on entering. At the door he reached out to snap on the apartment privacy field and then

hesitated. Was there anything that would be damaged if he left it in sight? It was a place to sleep like many others, where he ate also, but the equipment for that folded into the wall. Would anyone come in where he didn't belong and how could anything be harmed if someone did?

If the apartment were left in sight he'd save on the power bill. He went out, leaving the place bare. No one would want to see it.

There were countless people on the streets but he couldn't see them; all he could glimpse were the privacy shapes which surrounded them and since only a minimum of personality came to the surface, this didn't intrude. It was quiet in the city, or seemed so, though traffic was as dense as usual—everyone was on nonhearing. The eye alighted on geometrics or freeforms, some sparkling and others somber. Deftly Bellamy avoided contact with those coming toward him and those going in the same direction; he didn't want to offend.

Personal Contact was in a large building with its own glob. The field was turned down low and the actual structure was almost visible through it. It had to be low because there were always people entering or leaving and when the surfaces of two fields came together which hadn't been closely keyed there was an unpleasant reaction.

Shortly after giving his code he found himself alone in a room with the counsellor he'd called. That is he may have been alone and it may have been a room; from the blobs and globs he saw he couldn't be sure but for the same reason it didn't matter. They were isolated.

"Sit down," said the counsellor and actuated the controls so that he could see that the small glob in front of the larger one was a chair. He sat down and the surface reenfolded him. He adjusted his own privacy accordingly.

II

THE counsellor, he or she, it made no difference, rustled something. "We can

give you our decision, based on your report and hers, with an added interpretation." There was a pause that was filled with nothing. The counsellor may have been moving, reading, or dozing, but the blob didn't show it. Motion was distracting and since the privacy shape was usually considerably larger than the person it surrounded there was no need for it to change until the individual threatened to extend an arm or leg.

"Your report indicates that her ardour was satisfactory and your tactile sensations were pleasant. Good, since too great a passion can be intrusive. Your mental reaction to her is listed as neutral. Again excellent since a clash of personalities is undesirable."

How could they tell from the irrelevant questions they asked? Evidently they could because that was the way he felt.

"Her reactions are given in greater detail. Sex she rates as acceptable, both as to frequency and technique. I don't need to comment since this is not the first time either of you have used our services, and she particularly considers herself an adequate judge."

He'd take the compliment, but why didn't they come out and tell him? Did the process have to be so long?

"Mentally she considers you her equal though a bit on the romantic side. We can eliminate every drawback except one and it is a little difficult to talk about that."

He ought to have guessed. If everything was satisfactory Personal Contact would have notified him and that was all—he'd have been free to seek greater intimacy.

The counsellor blob darkened. He or she was in a responsible position and it was unthinkable that such a person would not have control of privacy at all times. Thus the darkened blob was intentional and significant. "Privacy is a delicate matter," said the counsellor. "It's impossible to define it exactly but everybody knows what it is when he's deprived of it."

"Problems of this nature are greater than they've ever been and in view of your attitude it seems worthwhile to repeat certain things that you ought to have learned long ago.

"You've heard of the Malthusian theory: that population increases geometrically and the food supply only arithmetically. We can be thankful that time has proved it to be wrong. The population has increased to the point where it's nearly impossible to get any more people on the planet even stacked up as they are in cities, and most of the surface of the earth is covered with cities. Still, we've managed to feed and clothe everyone adequately; the many synthetics we use have been proven harmless and in fact we thrive on them now that non-resistant strains have died off. In back of our civilization we have a philosophy that can be summed up in a few words: The greatest good for the greatest number.

"As clear as that is to us now there was once considerable debate as to where the emphasis belonged, on the 'greatest good,' or the 'greatest number.' There is no conflict for us and we've made the same decision that a number of ancient civilizations did, though ours was a conscious choice and theirs was not—India, China, Japan, and the United States in the middle of the twentieth century.

"Once we thought we'd get to other planets in the system and that may have influenced us, the idea that there would be colonies to which so-called 'surplus population' could migrate. It's true that we do have colonies on the moon, Venus, Mars, some of the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn, but they're quite small and the total is not as large as one city on earth. They serve primarily as sources of raw material. There are too many problems of heating and cooling, atmosphere, and transportation to think of enlarging them. We'll have to wait until we find a truly habitable planet out among the stars before we can move any large number of people off earth and

that will be some time in the distant future."

FOR a moment the counsellor paused. "Fortunately, just at the time that so-called overcrowding became acute there was an invention. It was the sight scrambler which is now known as the privacy field or blob. The use of it enabled us to build cities which rival insect heaps such as ants, which numbered individuals in the billions. There are now no ants on earth because there is no room for them.

"When man first settled any country, concentrations of people were few and far apart. He built houses on the highways and put porches in front so he could sit and watch men and women go by. Then as settlements grew he found that he no longer wanted to see people continually and he turned his houses inside out, away from the street where he and his family could foregather in solitude. Houses piled on top of each other and became apartments and to remedy the loss of privacy soundproofing was attempted, opaque glass was used, forced ventilation replaced open windows. And still privacy wasn't complete. There are dichotomies in human nature.

"Man needs to work with others and to be near them socially—gregariousness. But he also needs to be alone or his personality never develops—it is rubbed off by all the others he comes in contact with. If the concentration becomes too great he perishes as surely as if his body died.

"The privacy field solved the problem of how larger cities could be built without personality loss to the individuals who inhabited them. The privacy mechanism is contained in a belt which is powered by replaceable discs. It generates a field which doesn't disturb light entering it but which does scatter light as it leaves, enclosing the wearer with an anonymity which is impossible to penetrate. There was once talk of making the wearer invisible, but that is not

only technically impossible, it is also undesirable. Think of the traffic problems it would create!

"And there's no need for invisibility. Abstract shapes don't disturb anyone. From the beginning city man sensed there were irritations that outweighed the benefits of his way of life and he tried to minimize those irritations by dressing like his neighbor, thinking, talking, and behaving like him, so he wouldn't be noticed. Now it's no longer necessary. The privacy field has changed it. The decrease in tension and consequent mental aberration since the introduction of it is astonishing. No one has to consider his fellows as anything other than vaguely pleasing shapes who can not interfere with him actively or passively. The individual is complete.

"Bigger cities are possible and we're building them. More people can live on earth and they're being born.

"There are other problems. Distribution of products, the logistics of civilization, is far more important than it's ever been. Traffic handles that.

"And there are other difficulties. Individual relations are not so easy to initiate. Of necessity Personal Contacts takes care of that, screening everyone so that mutually pleasant associations are provided. Today most marriages take place through our efforts, though that was not our original function."

The counsellor coughed. "Relationships do spring up outside of our sponsorship. It's possible to walk down the street and see a man or woman winking off the privacy field for an instant. Showing is the term. In other days it was called exhibitionism or indecent exposure. Some misguided people try to strike up an acquaintance with these creatures; usually they're sorry they tried."

The counsellor actuated a control somewhere. The glob in front of Bellamy cleared, revealing a desk and on it the familiar reproduction of three monkeys. "See not, hear not, speak not," said the counsellor as the glob covered

it again, a soft geometric mound.

"Consideration is the keynote," the counsellor went on. "We must not intrude undesirably in anyone's life. The girl I'm afraid doesn't think you're considerate. She won't file a complaint because I think she likes you in spite of it. However she doesn't need to. We won't tolerate lewd and improper behaviour from any of our clients. If you persist we'll take action. Where will you be if we strike you off our rolls?"

His heart sank. He had misjudged his fiancée though she had seemed willing to listen.

"Casual sex is permissible since there must be some contact and she has complete control of her fertility cycle. But you must realize that she is not obligated to display any part of her body before you are legally affianced. It might cause her untold embarrassment."

The counsellor was stern. "As for her name, you are not permitted to ask that before you are married. She has some rights, you know.

"In view of your offenses against her privacy we're going to be harsh—you're placed on six months probation. Don't come back before then."

SOMEONE was waiting for him when he came home from work the next day. He didn't know it when he walked into the apartment and switched it into visibility. Globs disappeared and walls and chairs faded into view, except one glob, and it remained. "A trick of the trade," said a voice. "If the room wasn't so small or if you weren't one of those guys who has to have everything in sight, you wouldn't know that I'm here."

"Who are you?" asked Bellamy. He hadn't yet turned off his privacy, as he often did in his apartment.

"Not who I am, but what," was the reproachful reply. "I don't have to tell you anything unless I arrest you."

The chair glob changed, from a geometric form it slipped into the shapelessness that characterized the personal privacy field. At the same time the color

became dark blue and three superimposed lights winked on and off. "That tell you who I am?"

"You're from Traffic," said Bellamy. It was not the same man who had interviewed him the other day, the voice was different, but only Traffic had privacies which could produce such visual effects.

"Right." The shape slumped back. "Investigator, human problems. You can call me a detective."

"What do you want? You've got no right to break in."

"Listen, I've got a right to break into the ladies powder room." The detective laughed at the ancient joke. Since the sight scrambler provided real privacy there were no longer separate establishments for the sexes, but the jest died hard. "I want to talk to you. If you object I'll make it formal and you can come down to the department."

Bellamy sat down. "No objection."

The detective shape came nearer, abandoning the chair. "The guy died."

"Who?"

"The driver that rammed the building."

He didn't have anything to do with it, no matter what they thought. He'd seen the accident and stopped to help. That was all.

"Poor son of a blob," said the detective. "The car folded up on impact the way it does for parking and he was crushed. Anyway, we knew he was going to die so we pumped him full of drugs so he could talk. He talked."

Bellamy sat there. How reliable was the dying statement of a drug-filled, pain-ridden man?

"He said he was going along in the green and then a man ran out from the walk. The pedestrian had his privacy on and the driver swerved to miss him and might have done so except suddenly the field flickered off and there he was in front of the car covered with nothing but a business suit. He was screaming. The driver said he could see his face.

"That unnerved the driver and he flinched and hit the man—*scrunch!* The

driver was thrown out of control and the car flipped and headed into the building."

It proved one thing. Bellamy hadn't seen the same man. The one he'd seen wore an open collar, no jacket. "Who was the man who ran out?" he asked. "I didn't see him."

"Nobody saw him," said the detective. "But we think there was such a man. After the driver talked we went back and found a privacy mechanism near the curb at the scene of the accident."

"Just the mechanism, no body?"

"No body," said the detective. And his voice, and that was all Bellamy had to go on, conveyed the impression that he was uncomfortable. "We're not worried about the fact there was no body. We believe there was one. No one would go off and leave his privacy mechanism."

He didn't quite see it and maybe he wasn't supposed to. What had happened to the body of the unknown man? "Why are you telling me this? I didn't have anything to do with this."

"Maybe not. But there are some funny things about you."

"The fact that I stopped to help the poor son of a blob?"

"That's one thing. And then the other day you got bounced by your fiancée for lewd behaviour."

Traffic knew that too. But there was no connection, none at all.

"The other day my superior noticed something," the detective was saying. "Your privacy field was low—it had a peculiar sheen that doesn't occur until just before others can see through it. That can happen to anyone once in a while and no one pays attention, but if it's regular it's a significant thing. Anyway I dug into it and sure enough—you're a statistical deviate."

HE STARED at the detective shape. The average man was a sociological fiction, but if the deviation came in the wrong place it might have serious consequences. "What does that mean?"

"Not much or we wouldn't tolerate it," said the detective. "Actually it's partly our fault. We're responsible for the production of the mechanism and yours is beginning to show signs of wear, scattering light on the outside too, which is why you have to turn it down so you can see adequately. I'll put in for a replacement but it will take time to get a new one.

"But the real point is power," the detective rumbled on. "It takes power to run your privacy, an average of one disc a month. About a year ago you were all right and then you started slipping. Last month you were using half your quota. Since then you've applied for and received enough power discs to bring you back to normal for the entire year."

"I haven't," he protested. "Last time I got a disc was six weeks ago."

The detective grunted. "You're lucky I believe you. I've checked that and most of the discs you were credited with receiving were issued when you were at work half way across the town from the station they were turned in.

"Also I checked one of the discs before it was sent to the factory for re-charge. The code was right and it was your code, but it was forged. Very clever."

It was plausible. There was a place for two discs in the mechanism, one for present use and the other as a reserve so that no one ever need go without his field. When the power in one disc was used up there was an audible signal which warned the wearer who took it to a station where an exchange was effected. The code stamped on the disc was sufficient, no one ever asked for other identification. "But I thought the code couldn't be altered," said Bellamy.

"So did we," said the detective gloomily. "But we've got one that has been." He meditated. "I'll explain. It takes power to run privacy—and to break it too. We've got a huge mechanism in our salvage copters for that purpose. When we scoop down on a wreck we've got to

see what we're working with. That's why we forbid anyone to help. Unless they can see what they're doing, and they can't, they're apt to do more harm than good.

"However somebody has got something that will break through privacy and it's much smaller than anything we've yet developed."

It had to be leading to something like that. But he couldn't understand how the detective knew and said so.

"The pedestrian," answered the detective. "The driver said the field went off when the pedestrian's hands were over his head. Now I ask you, how could that happen if he was the one who turned it off?"

The detective believed the dead driver and there was no reason to doubt him. The pedestrian's privacy had been on and something nullified it. "What does this have to do with me?"

"I'll draw you a diagram," said the detective. "The pedestrian knew something about those forgers, or maybe he didn't and they're just killers. Anyway they followed him and he ran into the street to get away. It didn't help him—he's dead."

The detective was certain of that death even if there was no body. He ought to know. Bellamy shrugged, knowing the gesture couldn't be seen. The detective wasn't telling him everything.

His mind went back to the accident. The man in the crevice—*his* privacy had broken down—and could that have been caused by the black rodlike instrument in his hand? If so, could it do the same with a privacy field at a distance? The evidence suggested that it could, that it had.

The detective was still talking. "We don't think you know these forgers—but they know you. We're going to stick around and see what happens."

"Why should anything happen?" asked Bellamy sharply.

"Didn't I tell you?" said the other. "We traced the privacy mechanism we

found near the accident. The man it belonged to was a statistical deviate too." The detective flowed toward the door. "Do you want to co-operate with us?"

III

THE whole thing was puzzling. What did these people want with extra power? If they needed it to maintain stronger privacy it would be issued on a medical certificate. So they didn't use it on their own privacy.

For what purpose—to make things? Hardly, there was nothing they could make they couldn't buy cheaper. Unless they wanted weapons and then it became logical—compact portable power could be put to many uses.

Was the black rodlike device a weapon? Conceivably, it was large enough to contain five or six power discs and might be deadly. He didn't actually know this; he was only guessing. The man in the cervice might have pointed it at the pedestrian and broken through. It might even explain the disappearance of the body. No, that was unwarranted. It was *not* a disintegrator. He had proof that it wasn't: the driver had said it was impact that had caused him to lose control. The body had disappeared after the crash, not before. Obviously the man with the black rod was responsible for the death of the pedestrian but he had not caused the body to vanish.

Bellamy looked around the room, everything was in sight now that the detective was gone. Maybe he should have mentioned the incident to him, but it still didn't seem advisable. He was willing to co-operate but there was no point in implicating himself.

Bellamy wandered to the window and pressed the lever that aligned the planes of polarization and when the city came into view, looked down. It was big, one of the seven major population centers of North America. It stretched hundreds of miles in any direction. Big, but there were not many that he knew. That was the way it ought to be; too many friends

could interfere with privacy.

The detective had hinted he'd be safer inside but that was unnecessary. No matter where he went who would know who he was? That was one of the principles.

His unknown fiancée had rejected him and her solace was denied to him. And except work, what else was there? Abstract ballet? If he wanted, but any time he thought outsized amoebas moving fluidly was entertainment he'd go for a walk and there they'd be on the street, nearly as graceful as those on the stage.

The park? If the trees or flowers or both were turned on. He consulted the map of the surrounding section of the city. The timetable was against him. Trees were on view every third day and flowers every fifth and today was one of those barren periods in which nothing could be seen nearby. Farther away there were exhibitions but he'd have to use public transportation and it was not his week to do so. That was out. Briefly he wondered about it. Why did trees and flowers need the protection of privacy?

He shrugged and peeled off his clothing. Naked except for his privacy he walked out into the hall. There was a fine distinction between necessary and unnecessary privacy. Separate dwelling space was essential even if it was tiny. Soundproofing was not because of non-hearing, a device which worked similarly to the sight scrambler.

Individual bathrooms were not necessary because those functions could not be readily incorporated into one multi-purpose room, expansible in case of marriage and children by moving out adjacent tenants. Sociological calculations had proved that for every ten persons who shared a bathroom space was saved to accommodate three more dwelling units. There was little inconvenience because everyone had real privacy at the flick of a switch.

There were ten showers on Bellamy's floor and only two were occupied. He

stepped in one and turned on the water. He could see his hands dimly, faint quasi-shapes, as he splashed. That was one of the principles of the blob, that only light entering directly was not scattered unless the field was specially adjusted. The person who looked down at himself saw only diffused images. There were some extra sensitive people who had thus avoided seeing their own bodies since puberty.

Someone entered and with instinctive delicacy left an unoccupied shower between them. Neither young nor old, male nor female was the shape, in theory. In practice a man who had just lost his functioning fiancée could distinguish. The newcomer was a woman, twenty to thirty. And the blob around her was thin and getting thinner. Was she hinting or just thinking? Or she may have brushed against the controls and changed the setting without knowing it.

Around her feet the field was crackling, becoming spiderweb thin as the light scattering properties disappeared. He could see her feet, her knees, to her waist, and higher. Her head and shoulders were still shrouded with the practical equivalent of invisibility and it was tantalizing.

It had gone beyond hinting unless she was unaware of what had happened. He glanced; the others were gone. Bellamy turned back; in the few seconds he hadn't been looking her field had grown more dense and he could scarcely see her.

What did that prove?

It was difficult to believe that she was deliberately showing herself. She didn't seem to know he was staring at her; her behaviour didn't fit any pattern he was familiar with.

She stepped out of the shower and under the air blast and so did he. When she was dry she took a garment from a small waterproof bag he hadn't noticed and dressed quickly. She was scantily clad but it was acceptable if the field around her was dense enough. It wasn't.

AS SHE left he could still see her, though faintly. A passerby might not notice. From her familiarity with the place she must live here and he wanted to find out where. He could retire if she were returning to a husband or a lover.

Past his room they went. She stopped at the elevator and his disappointment was intense. She didn't live on this floor and he wouldn't find out where unless he followed her.

It was irrational and foolish and he had no excuse. He knew he ought to stay inside until Traffic had this straightened out. Instead he passed her, turned the corner, and as soon as he was out of sight, came back. She'd never be able to distinguish him from all the others in the hall.

He went back to his room, stepped into trousers and shoes and grabbed the rest and went out without putting them on. She was entering the elevator and by hurrying he managed to slide in with her. It didn't matter that he was still dressing, no one could see.

She went out into the street. He was not certain of what he was doing. He had to keep on or lose her. It was curious how the others on the street reacted, not the way he expected. She was visible when he concentrated on it, the flash of her legs, the swing of her arms. But the people on the street didn't notice. Was it because they didn't look at her as closely? Perhaps, but it didn't explain everything.

She was tireless. Soon they were in an area he didn't recognize; he'd never been in this part of the city. It wasn't important. If he could walk there he could walk back.

He was so engrossed in keeping her in sight that she nearly got away. She was ahead of him as she reached the corner; a few steps later he arrived at the same place and saw her vanishing into a building. He hurried to it and looked around.

It was a large building or the field around it was. There were no land-

marks in the sky. He started toward the door—and stopped.

Contact between the field enclosing the building and his own was not merely unpleasant. It hurt, physically. There was more power than he'd ever encountered in a field. Theoretically a field could be generated of such intensity that no other field of like nature could penetrate it. But of what value was it? It didn't make the building any more invisible than the minimum kind.

It did keep people out who weren't keyed to it, but no one would want to go in there who didn't have business inside. It was true he wanted to go in and not for business purposes, but he was an exception and his reasons were exceptional.

He thought it over in seconds. There was a method he could use in getting through; he ought not to consider it but he was beyond caring. The structure was enclosed in an intense field, tight fitting at the street level, conforming to every twist and curve of the architecture. The doors were shielded too, nothing unusual in this except that he couldn't force himself to go through.

At the sides there was a fold where a wall screened a door from the street. He hurried there, glanced around, turned off his privacy, and walked through with minor discomfort. It was worth a fine for exposure if he had been observed, but he was sure he hadn't been.

Once inside, his privacy went back on. The lobby was deserted as a consequence of the field. Someone would discover it was too strong and turn it down and the place would be filled as usual.

The girl wasn't in sight. He glanced at the blinking lights. The eighth, eleventh, sixteenth, and twenty-first floors showed up in rapid succession. Unless he'd missed an earlier stop she'd got off at one of those floors. He waited, but that was as high as the elevator went this trip.

Which floor and how could he locate her even if he knew? He brought the

elevator down and rode it to the eighth.

HE WANDERED through the halls but he never saw the faint glow which indicated that a door had recently been entered. The more he walked the more certain she hadn't stopped here. There was something strange about the place but he couldn't tell what it was.

The eleventh was next and he walked up. The time lapse was such that he could no longer expect an afterglow at the door to tell him which one she'd entered. He should have given up then but didn't. The strangeness was there too, greater than on the eighth and perhaps it was that which made him persist.

Doggedly he went to the elevator and dialed it to the sixteenth floor. It was there that the cause of the strangeness struck him and even then it took several minutes to penetrate.

No one was there.

The halls were empty—and there hadn't been anyone on the lower floors. And this high there was not one room that had a privacy field on it.

In all his life he had never been alone.

He had never walked down a street day or night on which other thousands were not also walking. He could ignore them since their shapes were not human, but he had always known what they were.

He'd never sat on a park bench watching trees and flowers if they were on view without being aware of the men and women around him. Had never gone out of his rooms without encountering blobs, taken a shower, or sat somewhere and thought.

Nor even, on the few trips he'd taken away from the city, looked down from the rocket and seen an uncultivated strip of land. Only in his own room or sometimes that of a fiancée was there a place in which he could hold to the illusion that he was alone.

And there in the middle of the city was a whole floor on which there was not a person in sight, in which there might not be anyone behind those doors

Unoccupied, not in use, wasted, vacant, empty.

Not one floor, perhaps most of this building. It was eerie. Why had she come here?

It wouldn't be easy to find her. Emptiness began at the eighth floor or perhaps lower and he was certain it went to the twenty-first floor, more if the building was higher. He couldn't go around banging doors. There were too many doors.

The method, when he thought of it, was simple. He turned off non-hearing.

And there was silence. He'd never heard silence before.

And it was real; it wasn't the result of muddling sounds into a subdued and continuous roar, nor that which ensued when some frequencies were kicked up higher than the human ear could catch because then the vibrations were still there and had an effect on other parts of the body. The nonhearing that everyone wore was not perfect though it gave that impression to the wearer. It isolated him from the confused sounds of the city that threatened to break in through the periphery of his consciousness.

Bellamy listened. There was no sound except the creaking of the structure as it swayed. Why did it sway? There was no breeze near the center of the city; there never was. As he stood there he became aware of other sounds, traffic. But it came from the outside and was faint and he could distinguish it from anything originating inside.

From the sixteenth floor he walked. Seventeenth was silent and so was eighteenth. As he walked from the nineteenth up he heard something. At the top of the stairs voices rose over the external traffic sounds. He crept quietly toward the source. The exterior walls were sturdy, but interior partitions were flimsy, permeable even to whispers.

He stood near the door. It was revolutionary, his method for hearing what went on inside, simply turning off non-

hearing. It was a wonder someone hadn't thought of it before. There were at least three people in the room and that meant the girl wasn't with her lover. Obscurely he was glad of that.

But if they weren't lovers, what were they? Why should more than two people voluntarily come together? A family, before the children had grown up and left to seek their privacy? Here? He leaned his head near the door and listened.

"You're sure you weren't followed?" It was a man's voice.

"I wasn't. Why should anyone want to?" This was the girl; he'd never heard her speak but he was certain it was she.

"Why?" There was a chuckle. "Any man with sense would come running after you if he could see."

"No one saw me and I wasn't followed." She was wrong on both counts.

"What's the status of the case now?" Case. It had a clinical sound he didn't like. And the voice was that of another man.

"I waited around for a few days, dropping him when he went to work and getting some sleep, picking him up as he came home. He doesn't do much. I guess there's nothing for him to do." This was the girl. "Today he had a visit from Traffic, a detective. I made myself into a cozy furniture glob outside his room and turned off nonhearing, stuffing one ear solid and leaning against the wall. I could hear most of what they were saying."

He wasn't the first to think of that eavesdropping method. She had anticipated him. And—*she was talking about him!* He had stumbled on something that might be important.

"Traffic spotted him when he stopped to look at one of our cases, an accident. They've checked him and by now they know he's what they call a statistical deviate. That's how they keep track of them. They want him to co-operate in locating us and the poor blob doesn't know any better. He's willing."

IT WAS more important than he thought. The girl hadn't been in the building in which he lived by accident but it was pure chance that he had noticed her. But whatever caused it, he had found the men that the Traffic detective was after. They seemed ordinary enough, but that was misleading. The building they were in was strange.

And—why did she keep insisting that he was a statistical deviate? He was getting tired of hearing the term applied to him. It wasn't his fault, in fact had nothing to do with him.

"I waited until the detective left," said the girl. "I allowed extra time to make sure. After that, in case I'd overlooked anything, I acted as though I lived in the place. I went to the shower, took one, kept my privacy high, and walked out, coming here by an indirect route."

"Good girl," said the man.

She had overlooked something though she didn't seem to be aware of it. Her field was not high. She was actually showing.

"We've considered what you've asked us, Vanelda," said the man. Vanelda? Her name, an important clue. "And our answer must be—no. Statistical deviation, and Traffic would call it that, is just a symptom. What lies behind it is incurable and you know it. We can't afford to load ourselves down."

And there it was again. But their definition seemed to be different from the detective's. As nearly as he could make sense of what they were saying, they regarded it as something that did affect him personally, a mental or physical ailment, not a defective instrument. He'd have to check up on it. The detective was not above misusing the truth.

And it was nice of her to speak for him, if that's what she was doing. He preferred to remain out of their organization.

"But there's nothing we can do?"

"Nothing. You're emotionally involved. It had to happen I suppose after

so many times. But you can't let yourself get entangled. You're the best female operative we have. Without you we'd miss half of them."

They'd miss half of what? And what kind of an operator was she? The conversation was impossible to follow.

"If he had some talent or thought as we do it might be different. As it is he wouldn't know what we're talking about, but if he did, how long would he last? A month? Or a year? And then the inevitable results. It's not just us, but everything we've worked for."

What would happen after a month or a year? The same thing that befell the pedestrian? According to the detective these people had killed him. How they did it was unknown, but it looked as if the detective was right. But still, his conclusions didn't square with their attitudes. There was something he was missing.

And what *were* they working for? From the way the man spoke it must be idealistic. But it wasn't the first time high ideals had covered some pretty low motives.

"You're right," said Vanelda, and her voice wasn't angry, merely tired. "Two more is all I can take though. Two more and I'm through."

"It isn't pleasant," said the man. "We know that. Do the best you can."

"Sure," said Vanelda, and broke off. "Someone's coming."

"Jerome and Patricia. I can recognize their steps."

There was someone coming up the steps. They could hear it better than he because they were accustomed to silence. And they knew each other's names. Only the first names, but even that wasn't customary in group behavior. Groups themselves were certainly not common.

He had to hide before the couple got here. He went quietly across the hall to the room behind him. It wasn't locked or protected in any way, no privacy on it; he went in and left a crack of the door open.

The man and woman coming down the hall weren't concealed. One of them carried a package and Bellamy felt curiosity about what was in it.

He was able to see through the crack into the room they entered. It was a queer tableau. There was a man with a bald head and the fierce eyebrows—the one he'd seen near the accident. He still carried the black rod slung at his belt. He'd guessed right—the man *was* responsible for the pedestrian's death. There was another man with a pointed gray beard and dirty hands.

And then there was Vanelda.

She was standing on a dais, nude from the waist up, a cloth draped loosely around her hips. Her hair was drawn close to her head and she didn't have any arms. He was able to get one more quick glimpse before the door closed on the newcomers. She did have arms but they were dusted with some substance which, under the peculiar lighting arrangement in there, made them seem to disappear.

If he hadn't known it before he was certain now. These were the people the Traffic detective wanted. Vanelda too. And what was the purpose for which they had banded together? They used the power discs which ordinarily ran the privacy mechanism, but not as they were ordinarily used. He suspected that in part these discs went into augmenting the field around the building. But again, why did they need the building?

It would all come out when Traffic got them and in a way he'd be sorry to see it happen. Vanelda. She didn't seem happy in her role; and whatever it was it included spying on him. She was one girl who wouldn't object if he wanted to look at her.

He shrugged and listened. They were still talking but he couldn't hear much through two doors. And more people were constantly arriving though they never came directly on the elevator. They preferred landing on some other floor and walking up or down, taking no chances on being followed.

It was time to get out. He couldn't learn more by staying and he did run the risk of being discovered. He looked around; the room he was in had another door on the opposite side and he moved quietly toward it. That door led into another room which then opened on a hall at some distance from the conspiratorial group. After some search he found an elevator—not the one he'd come up on—it seemed safe to use since, going down it wouldn't stop for those who were coming up. And everyone was coming up. He walked across the lobby and hoped he wasn't noticed. There were others encased in privacy as he was.

IV

THE people who came here, and for the most part, Bellamy had a good idea who they were, were keyed to the surrounding glob and had no need to switch on and off. For them there was no clash of fields. There was for Bellamy and, considering the strength of the one field, interpenetration might be lethal. He didn't have any desire to find out whether it was.

He turned off his privacy, waited while the blob died, and stepped through again, turning it on as soon as he was outside. On the sidewalk he looked around; he was sure he hadn't been observed. He walked on and when he looked back someone was coming out of the building not far behind him.

Was he so certain he hadn't been detected leaving the building? He wasn't.

There was an instant on either side in which he had been clearly visible. The average man would be indifferent, but those who knew what the building was for wouldn't be. They'd know he didn't belong, that he wasn't one of them.

He walked faster and the shape behind him fell back but it still headed in the same direction he was going. It might be a coincidence. He looked back and the man following him, if he was following, couldn't tell that he'd turned his head. It was one of the advantages

of privacy.

But there were disadvantages. Bellamy turned at the first corner and slowed down on the other side. The person he suspected didn't pass the corner, either continuing straight or turning with him. The man, if it was a man, might have gone back or stopped somewhere before the corner. Equally easy he might have altered his shape and Bellamy would not know what he looked like. It wasn't a pleasant thought and Bellamy hurried on.

Did the man—or the shape—it was best to think of it impersonally—have to be behind him? If *he* wanted to follow someone who might be aware of his intentions, how would he make sure the other wouldn't get out of sight for an instant? He'd have to change his tactics, but he was sure it could be successfully accomplished.

First he would walk closer, beside or even slightly ahead of the man he wanted to keep in sight. Privacy shapes were always changing a little in response to mental tension, but after fifteen minutes or so on a given day in the same mood, patterns began to repeat and an observant person could catalogue another and keep him separate from so many others nearly like him.

This was true only so long as a man didn't consciously select. He could change the power setting at random and, if he had control, he could do the same with his mind, be consciously happy, erotic, murderous, angry or afraid. Overlying one emotion with another, shifting and combining, the number of permutations was endless and the privacy shape responded accordingly. It wouldn't change much, but it didn't have to.

Bellamy glanced at the shapes around him and they blurred. Which one? If there was something to distinguish one man from the sea of anonymous humanity around him—but there wasn't. He couldn't be sure.

He walked on and his legs began to ache. He scanned the crowd until his eyes were burning. He might be imagin-

ing it and there was truly nothing to be afraid of. But he could tell less than before and everyone seemed to exude danger and hostility. He ought to stop someone—but who? They were all on nonhearing and wouldn't listen.

The detective would come to help him, if he could reach the detective quickly. But he'd have to wait in line at any public place he could call from, and it was better to keep moving. He'd give himself away if he stopped, would be such an easy target for that black rod. He kept moving.

If there were some deserted street down which he could walk—he'd be able to spot anyone who came after him. But there was no such street in the city, perhaps not on all of earth. . . .

ONE thing he knew, he had to stay away from the curb. A sudden shove or an unintentional jostle while some shape overlapped his and he would be thrown into the path of oncoming vehicles. That's what had happened to the pedestrian, wasn't it? Fortunately at intersections the walk looped under or over the roadway, never directly across.

Or if he could contact Traffic. They might not believe him but in their custody he'd be safe. The difficulty was in getting to them. They were overhead.

Heavy bulky freight and public transportation went under the city; pedestrians and privately owned vehicles traveled the surface; and light critical supplies which had to be rushed here and there with great speed to avert shortages flew the airplanes close to the tops of the tallest buildings. Once there had been private planes, but that was long ago, before Bellamy was born. Congestion was now such that they couldn't fly there any longer; it was not lack of production that made private planes impossible—there simply was no space in which they could fly.

And over everything, because someone had to regulate the flow, was Traffic. Higher than the commercial air carriers, watching, ready to dash in and

unsnarl any stoppage that might ensue, was Traffic. They primarily controlled motion and were not much concerned with what men did to one another because there was so seldom any violence. They were not available for the emergency that confronted Bellamy.

Or weren't they? He began to laugh, knowing he couldn't be heard. He had an infallible method for summoning whether they liked it or not. They'd come down though they were so high he didn't exist as a dot on their screens. They'd come.

He screwed nonhearing solidly down. He didn't want to hear. He felt for the controls of his privacy mechanism. He walked on and chose the places carefully, the intersection of two pedestrian walks.

And then he stopped and wouldn't move, oblivious to the shouted curses, screeches and commands, as those who screamed at him knew very well he would be. The intersection choked with people who couldn't move if he wouldn't. The paralysis spread rapidly on either side. The walks were frozen and the would-be killer, if there was one, didn't dare act because he couldn't get away. Bellamy stood there until Traffic swooped down from high overhead and snatched him up.

He was hysterically safe.

IF THERE actually was someone, you did the only thing you could," concluded the detective. "Don't ask me for approval; I'm not supposed to condone things like that."

"I don't know," said Bellamy. "I thought there was but I couldn't be sure. I couldn't think clearly."

"It hits some people like that at certain stages," said the detective. "They panic easily."

It was the opening he'd waited for. "Stages of what?" he asked casually.

"I was hoping you'd let it go at what I told you." The detective laughed.

"Why should I?" he asked. "You're anxious to catch them and I'll help, but I've got a right to know where I stand."

"Didn't want to worry you," said the detective. "Sure, I concealed part of the truth from you but I was going to make it up after this is over."

He could believe that or not as he wished, and he didn't—not completely. "They seemed to think it was something that involved me personally, not just a defective instrument. And they said it couldn't be cured."

"They would," commented the detective acidly. He paused and thought. "I didn't want to tell you because you'd get upset. Looks like I'll have to." He sighed. "There is another reason why your privacy field might have that sheen, a remote possibility, but it ought to be considered. Your eyes. Your own field doesn't affect you but that of others do, because the shapes don't ever stay still—they seem to flow. You get sensations of vertigo and your eye distorts trying to follow the changes. Doesn't happen often but when it does it can be corrected by surgery. We can cut your eyes to pieces and put them back together better than new, or give you replacements. If that is the trouble, and I don't think it is, we were going to do that for you after we're through with this. The damage was done long before we spotted you and we didn't see why we shouldn't go ahead and take care of you later. It doesn't hurt much, does it?"

It didn't hurt at all and he could see their point, any time was as good as now; and surgery would interrupt their plans. And it was true that medical skill could do anything to his eyes that needed to be done. Still—

"They said it was incurable," he said obstinately.

The detective chuckled. "They'd want you to think that, sure. I guess it is fatal to anyone they get their claws into.

"They go to a lot of trouble getting people like you. Not finding you, that's easy. They walk down the street and see dozens of fields with that sheen on it. But that's just the beginning; they've

got to investigate and find out which ones are accidentally like that and which are chronic.

"And then they have to get the code. I don't know how they do it because everyone keeps his code protected by the field, it's part of his personality. But once they do they've got you and can go on the rest of your life drawing a power disc every other month with no one the wiser. One day you sense there's something wrong and get your instruments repaired or replaced or your eyes cut up and put back into shape and everything's changed—you use up the normal quota and they're excluded.

"They don't like it and see to it that you're not around to bother them any longer, probably taking the discs you've got on you, and maybe draw on your power account for a while until you're officially listed as dead. They salvage *something* out of the work they've put in on you."

It sounded logical and yet there was a flaw in it, though he couldn't pinpoint it. "You don't mind if I verify your version of what can be wrong with me?"

"Go ahead," said the detective. "Of course I've got plans for you. I'll tell you about them later."

His heart pounded. Was the detective being completely honest with him? He'd have to check. Those plans sounded suspicious.

"I haven't found that building yet," said the detective.

What was the matter with Traffic that they were so slow? A day had passed since they had scooped him out of danger and how long did it take for that vast organization to start moving?

THE detective guessed his thoughts. "It's not so easy. You say you followed the girl an hour, but you don't know; it may have been longer, as much as two hours. You don't know the direction or anything else because you were busy keeping her in sight. Same thing when you left the building only more so. I know where Traffic picked you up

but that doesn't help because it was near here. You may have wandered around in circles or maybe you came directly back."

The Traffic detective went to the map on the wall, a necessity for every citizen of the city. He drew two circles, large and small. "I'd estimate you can recognize everything in the small circle on sight even if the fields enclosing the buildings do change every day. Right?"

"I think so."

"Sure. The large circle represents the greatest distance you might have gone, assuming an average rate and a straight route. Since you didn't recognize it, it's between the large and small circles. How many buildings do you suppose we'd have to look through?"

With that kind of reasoning the number was very large. "But I gave you a description."

"How much do you think it's worth? You described the privacy, which is hardly ever the same."

"You can eliminate some. It's not under twenty-one stories."

"That helps," said the detective ironically. "There are exactly three buildings in the area we have to look through under that height. It would be different if you knew the actual number of stories."

But he didn't and there hadn't been time to check. And he hadn't been able to ascertain the street names or rather codes on which it was located. Every street had a number but it wasn't in plain sight since that would subtract from the privacy of those who lived on it. The building might be anywhere within a radius of five or six miles. It was a huge task, but Traffic ought to be equal to it. "Can't you search the whole area if you have to?"

"We can." The detective wandered to a chair and sank down in it and out of habit became a furniture glob. "We'd have to mobilize and I'd have to have an awful good reason to ask for so many men. The thing is, you were hysterical. I can't tell what you saw and what you imagined."

"You've got ways of testing me." Not that he was asking for it, but it was preferable to being disbelieved.

"We have," admitted the detective. "They're not as effective as you think though. And I'm not going to use those methods on you. Surprised?"

He was, and he couldn't account for the man's attitude. The detective was doing nothing, waiting for things to happen. And mostly they were happening to him.

"Think it over," said the detective. "Everything you've told me I've kept to myself—no one else knows—and they're not going to know until everything's the way I want it.

"Look back. A building, empty from the eighth to the twenty-first floor, maybe higher? It can't be. I'm in a position to know and I've never heard of more than a few rooms on a floor being vacant—and then just as a margin to allow people to get married and have kids, or change jobs and consequently places to live."

The detective grunted. "Traffic is responsible for every person on the planet, and supplies to feed and clothe him. The bookkeeping that went into that place, making sure that no one was moved in who would give them away, was tremendous. There's only one way it could be done. Someone in Traffic did it. Somebody big."

Traffic itself—and he should have guessed. How else? That made it more dangerous, for himself and the detective.

"Don't misunderstand me," said the detective. "There's nobody so big we can't break, in Traffic or out of it—we get the evidence. Until we know who it is we've got to go slow, play safe. I've got to handle this alone, because I don't know who I can trust. It might be my superior."

Bellamy stared disheartenedly at the irregular shape as it moved toward the door. He didn't mind co-operating but not when he was being squeezed by forces that left so little room for him to

act freely.

Something emerged from the privacy enclosing the detective and fluttered toward him. He caught it and adjusted the field for reading. Another force had been added—and he didn't approve. "I have no objection," he said finally. "But do you think I ought to do it now? You can get me deferred, can't you?"

"I can," admitted the detective. "But I won't. In fact I pulled strings to have it come out this way. You'll be out of Traffic's jurisdiction—much safer there I think. By the time you get out I'll know what I'm doing."

Bellamy nodded glumly. It was this that the detective said he had planned for him. He had barely time to get ready for it and it would force him to postpone the medical examination which would confirm whether the detective was telling the truth. Now he'd have to wait till later. But there was no real hurry.

It was the Sight Draft, and he, as every adult did, had to respond periodically. But was it as secure there as the detective said? There was more to safety than sight just as, conversely, anonymity was itself no real protection. Individual violence is a complex thing and the only boundaries to it lie within.

V

THE woman came self-consciously to the door. Was she pretty and how could anyone tell what beauty was? Once there had been a standard. It had varied from person to person and still more between cultures but at least each man knew what he liked. And Bellamy didn't know. The city sparkled with colors and a changing fluid skyline, strange and sometimes lovely, the streets streaked with speed that one could look down on and find pleasant; but the city was abstract and aloof and didn't relate to humans. The woman pawed her hair.

"Come in," she said.

He stepped inside and switched off privacy, looking around. It was larger than his place but that was to be ex-

pected in Sight Center where there was nothing that could be concealed to give the illusion of greater space.

"My husband is out," she said nervously. "He went to bring the other—person."

She wore a single garment that began above her knees and failed to cover all her arms. She had made an attempt to arrange her hair elaborately, but she lacked the necessary practice. Her lips were smeared. Lipstick, wasn't it? It had been two years since he'd spent a week with a family and at the time he hadn't thought much about it. "I'm Hugh Bellamy," he said. "I'm glad I can help out."

"Sorry for your trouble." She repeated the expected phrase mechanically. "You don't have to tell me your whole name. Just the first part. I'm Elizabeth."

Why was she upset? She hadn't come here because she got a thrill out of exposing herself. It was required by law. Lewdness was a state of mind, beholder or beholden. "I don't mind," he said. "If you'd rather, I'll leave and come back when your husband is here."

"You must stay. I want you to meet my son." Again she patted her hair. "Bobby." Her voice was shrill.

A smaller version of the adult street size amoeba came in.

"Bobby," she said instantly. "How many times must I tell you that you can not turn that on while you're here?"

"Why blobba?"

"Because. We're here to see people. And how do you think they feel if you're concealed?"

"Don't want them to see me," grumbled the child. "Faces. They're not nice."

"Bobby. If you don't behave I'll take your belt away and you can't have it back until you leave. How would you like that?"

Reluctantly the amoeba faded and was replaced by a child of seven, or ten. Bellamy couldn't tell.

"That's better," chattered the woman.

Would she never shut up? Privacy and nonhearing were both forbidden here. Nevertheless Bellamy turned on the latter so that her voice became less loud. "Bobby, this is Hugh. He's going to spend the week with us. Isn't that nice?"

Bobby looked at the intruder with lowered eyes. Plainly he didn't think it was nice. His hair was tousled and there was a smudge on his face. "Is Hugh a man?" he asked gravely, turning to his mother.

"Of course darling. Can't you see he doesn't look like me?"

The child returned to his appraisal. "He's bigger than you," he ventured.

"Yes, but that's not the difference."

"What is the difference blobba?"

"Never mind. Run out and play. Wouldn't you like to climb a real tree, one that you can see? And there's a dog. It will come to you if you whistle."

"Don't want to," said the boy. "The man's so funny I want to look at him."

"He's not," said the woman, raising her voice. "That's the way men look. Now run out and play and *don't* turn on your blob."

The child went away and the woman turned to him, more at ease. "It's so good for Bobby here," she said. "Otherwise he might grow up not knowing what humans look like. Other humans," she hastened to add. "We've had his blob keyed to ours and we can always see what he's doing. That's for his protection. And in the evening we usually turn off for a few hours so he can see us. He knows what we look like but I'm afraid he's not accustomed to others."

Bellamy looked out the window as she tried to talk herself through her nervousness. He wished she'd be quiet. Sight Center was different, relaxing, and he'd never really gone through it. This time maybe he ought to.

It was isolated from the city by a gigantic privacy glob which, considering its size, substituted nicely for the sky and the horizon. It might have been a preprivacy village set in an endless

plain. Might have been except for the vibrations from the city which shook the great privacy field and caused it to blur at the edges. The houses were one and two story rambling structures and there were no roadways, just sidewalks. The theory was—but at the moment Bellamy didn't care about the theory.

OUTSIDE the boy sidled closer to a tree, cautiously, as if it might disappear. In his experience in the park, trees did that. Tentatively he reached out and touched a leaf, tearing it off. The window was closed but Bellamy could hear faintly. "Dirty old tree," said the child, spitting at it.

The dog trotted up, wagging its tail. The child looked at it fearfully and then kicked. "Dirty old dog," said the boy. The animal slunk away.

The boy wandered farther, looking anxiously at the window. He could see his mother and, if she turned her head, she could see him. Indecisively the child fingered the privacy controls and then tore his hand away as if the belt hurt. He dropped down in the dirt, real dirt, not cement or plastic gravel.

"It's so good for children here," the woman was saying. "Lately Blobby's been having nightmares and I'm hoping this will help him get over it. I don't know what we'll do when he's fourteen and will be given his adult mechanism and will have complete control over his own privacy. We won't be able to come as a family."

Did she actually think that or was it merely an expression to conform with what was expected of her? Outside the child picked up his multitoys. The dog came near and he chased it, dragging his toy with him. Bellamy remembered the plaything from his own childhood. Times hadn't changed.

The toy was made from a variety of memory plastic. Squeezed one way it became a rocket. Again and it stretched into a surface car, sleek and long and racy. Touched another place and it folded up into a tenth the space, as real

cars did for parking. It also became a doll, male or female, a dog, or a ball. As Bellamy watched, the child wracked it swiftly through the changes. He finished with what was a very credible imitation of the adult privacy blob, not quite shapeless, but neither did it resemble the human form. The boy clutched it to his breast and muttered. Bellamy couldn't hear what he was saying.

The woman straightened up. "They're here," she said, tugging at her clothing. It was the same clothing she usually wore and there was nothing wrong with it but it made a difference whether there was privacy to cover it.

Bellamy glanced at the child in the yard, for whose sake he had come here. The boy was swaying back and forth, strangling the amorphous doll fiercely. "Blobba," he sang. "Rock me to sleep, blobba."

DARLING stop frowning," said the woman. "No, that's almost a frown too. Philip, this is Hugh."

"Was I frowning?" The man extended his hand. "Sorry for your trouble," he said.

It was an unnecessary gesture. When both persons had their privacy on it was nearly impossible to shake hands and so the custom languished. It was ridiculous to insist on it in Sight Center.

"Where's the woman?" asked Elizabeth.

"She's at the entrance, checking credentials with the guard. Can't have perverts getting in here."

"Should it take that long? I thought everything was arranged."

"It was, but the woman who was supposed to show up didn't and at the last minute Personal Contact had to send a substitute." Philip looked at Bellamy and looked away, frowning shyly. His expressions were quite limited.

Bellamy could see the woman coming up the walk toward the open door. She was dressed much in the same fashion that Elizabeth was except that more of her arms and legs were visible and the

neckline was cut lower. And the garment fit more tightly; either someone had skimped on the material or she actually was more rounded, fuller. Bellamy had the uncomfortable feeling that in another era she would be considered an attractive woman. Physical attributes didn't matter much now because they were so seldom displayed—and that was fortunate for the less well-endowed. It was emotional reaction which counted and—Bellamy found himself wondering whether she would make love well.

And surely it would never happen because it was arranged that each household in Sight Center consisted of the family and two unattached adults of opposite sex who had not met previously and who would never do so again, except accidentally; and, then would never recognize the other if they did. It was a pity because he would like to touch her and look at her while he did. She came closer and he got a good look at her.

It was Vanelda.

He never remembered how he got through the next few minutes but apparently he did well enough, retaining his composure by imagining himself tightly enclosed in his privacy. He was seated opposite Vanelda while Elizabeth peered at them myopically as many people did when they were deprived of the protection of their field. "You two stay here and get acquainted," Elizabeth was saying. "You have to live in the same house for a week and it's not fair to impose on you. Philip and I will go out and play with our son." And then Elizabeth was gone.

What had happened to the woman whose place Vanelda had taken? He could guess. And why had she come? There had to be a reason but it was difficult to see what it was. It wasn't as safe here as the detective had assumed. He had to get word out but it wasn't going to be easy to do so without arousing her suspicions. He had to remember that Traffic had no jurisdiction over Sight Center.

"Hugh, can't you relax?" For an instant he half believed that her smile was real and friendly. It didn't compare with Philip's perennial frown and the quick birdlike twitch that flicked across Elizabeth's face. And how many voices did she have? She hadn't sounded like this in the building.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "It's just that this is strange."

"I know. It's not what we're accustomed to. But it has to be done for the children's sake."

Children seemed a safe subject until he could determine what to do. She knew him outside, his name, his code, and where he lived, but had she ever actually seen him? As far as he knew she hadn't and thus the advantage might still lie with him—*unless she had come here knowing who he was*. It seemed likely that she did know, but he couldn't be sure.

He shook the thoughts out of his head and discussed children with her for a few minutes. He had to cover his confusion.

"—no blob until they're two," he heard her saying . . . And—what had he asked? "From then until nine it's optional at home, though most parents want their children to have it, and it's always necessary on the streets at any age. From nine until fourteen they're required to wear it half the time at home and at fourteen they're issued the adult instrument."

He knew the rules, he'd grown up under them. "But what if parents separate?"

"They hardly ever do. By the time they're married most of them have experimentation out of their system. Besides, there's not much room for incompatibility. Neither has to look at the other, nor listen. Bodily exposure is kept to a minimum and there's no disappointment, no lewd thoughts."

He smiled at her last remarks. He had proof that personally she didn't believe what she was expounding. She glanced at him sharply and his smile

froze where it was. He'd forgotten he had no privacy.

"We're forgetting the purpose for which we're here," she said, getting up. "Let's join the happy family."

He followed her reluctantly. He'd have to contact the detective later. The happy family didn't fall into the pattern he'd envisioned for happiness. Philip scowled at a tree; Elizabeth sat as if she had too many legs curled under her; the child shook the multitoys, wracking it through its repertoire. There was no place they could look in peace. Around them were other houses, trees, flowers, dogs, but mostly it was other people exactly like themselves that intruded.

Vanelda alone seemed at ease as she walked toward them. Bellamy looked at her enviously until he remembered what she was.

HE HAD fallen asleep and now he awakened. It was night and the darkness held qualities he wasn't used to. In his own apartment he slept with his privacy off and it was dark but he had only to twist the polarizing planes of the window and the room would be illuminated from the glare of the city outside. Here it was dark outside—and did that make a difference? It seemed to.

And there was no sound. Or there was, but it was not the same as the interminable subdued roar of traffic. There was a scratching noise at the wall. A mouse? That was the little creature, wasn't it, that crept inside walls, or used to before walls were made on a single thin sheet of material. No, this was different, the sound of a branch scraping against the house. And that rustling resulted from the wind disturbing leaves.

The family was asleep. He'd allowed enough time for them; they should have difficulty the first night. If there was any trouble it would come from Vanelda.

He got out of bed and the floor creaked. Dammit, you'd think they'd build solidly. He had three hours or more to get out of the house and leave

Sight Center to call the detective. It was too bad there was no screen in the house, but that came from the antique notions of Personal Contact. There was a public communication system somewhere in Sight Center but there would be lines there and he might as well go outside where he wouldn't have to state the nature of his business.

The guard would let him out. He'd pretend he wanted to escape the isolation and the man would wink at it as long as he got back at a reasonable hour. He could arrange it.

It would be up to the detective to follow Vanelda after she left this place. He might actually come in here himself, under some pretext or another, and watch her through the week.

A sound interrupted his thoughts. Not the branch nor his own breathing—and it was odd that breath did cause sounds—this came from the hall. Someone was moving out there. There was only one person it could be.

He thought of the black rod that seemed to be the trademark of those people in the building. If she knew who he was when she came here—and why else was she stealthily coming toward him—she'd have one concealed in the extra clothing she'd brought with her. He had nothing in his favor except superior strength and the knowledge that she was stealing toward him.

He squeezed next to the door. She was outside and he let her come in. The door opened and she passed noiselessly through. He waited an instant too long and she was beyond his reach. Now he had to wait until something revealed exactly where she was.

"Hugh," she whispered from the region of the bed. "Hugh, where are you?"

He miscalculated and fell rather than leaped on her.

"Don't be so violent," she said, laughing and yet irritated too. "You don't have to subdue me."

The conditions approximated all the other times and so he was able to tell who she actually was. He couldn't see a

line of her body but he could touch her and sense her presence and it was impossible to make a mistake.

It was Vanelda, but Vanelda was his ex-fiancée, the one who had reported him to the counsellor because he wanted to see her. He couldn't understand it and perhaps he wasn't meant to. She was the girl who didn't mind at all standing nearly nude in front of a group of men and women.

It was clear what he had to do. He stripped the garment from her with a skill he never knew he had.

BELLAMY yawned lazily as the morning sun streamed through the plain glass window. It was one of those things that made the place quite pleasant. He got up. Six more days and he was through here, finished, and he was going to regret it. Vanelda of course, and now could he say why she had come here? He couldn't. It wasn't an accident, and therefore it had been arranged. Why?

He hadn't asked her anything, there were good reasons he couldn't, and she hadn't volunteered. Maybe that was a mistake. He should have insisted. But it would have done no good. If he had tried to work information out of her she'd have been suspicious of how much he already knew. She must think he was ignorant of the forces that were pushing him about.

He examined the conclusion again. She hadn't told him that she was his ex-fiancée but he knew. Also, she couldn't have known that he had observed her in the building. He might have been detected leaving the building and subsequently followed, but they hadn't found out who it was.

So much for that and what else? Why had she come here? Not to dispose of him as he had at first thought. That was an unwarranted assumption to begin with—that she would come into a limited environment where escape was difficult and her full identity was known, not to him but to Personal Contact—

and attempt to kill him. Why should she, when it was so much easier in the city, with no risk?

The conclusion that he could accept was that she had come because she wanted to because of him. That fitted in. She had been arguing for him in the building—or he could interpret it that way—and the others had voted her down.

Another thing appeared probable, merely probable. She'd come here on her own, not necessarily against the advice of the others, but possibly without their consent.

It was flattering and he didn't doubt that it was true, but it made things difficult for him. How could he turn her over to the detective now that he knew how she felt toward him? It may have begun as just another affair assigned to them by Personal Contact but that was no longer true as far as her emotions were concerned. There was only one reason that made him decide that he had to call the detective.

He finished dressing and went out. Elizabeth was at the breakfast table. Her face was lumpy and the expression on it had started out earlier with the intention of staying cheerful. "Bobby's already eaten," she said rapidly. "He's out playing somewhere. He's having a wonderful time."

He could visualize the kid having a wonderful time, hiding under a bush where he couldn't be seen, slapping that multitoys around. He looked around and nodded. He tended to exaggerate his gestures, how much he didn't realize until his privacy was off.

"Philip's out too," she hurried on. She seemed to think she was going to forget what she had memorized. "I think he went for a walk in the forest."

The grove of trees not far away was hardly a forest but he let it pass. Philip the first one up? Only if he hadn't been able to sleep. It was none of his business.

"If you're waiting for Vanelda, don't," said Elizabeth. "There was a

mixup and the person who was originally supposed to come got her notification a day late. She's arriving this morning and meanwhile Vanelda's packed and left. It's upsetting and not according to rules but I don't think it will make any difference. Blobby didn't look at her once while she was here."

IT WOULDN'T mean anything to the kid; he was too scared to notice what anyone looked like. But it meant something to him. He'd been counting. . . . He sat down.

"You liked her, didn't you?" said Elizabeth. "I watched you—and then there was last night. Don't think I didn't hear."

Liked her? He hadn't thought of it. But there *was* so much more to a woman when you could see her.

"I wish—" said Elizabeth, and then got up and left without finishing her wish.

He didn't glance up; what was the matter with her?

Slowly the numbness left. Why had he delayed; what was the matter with him? He'd let her slip away and now he was back in the same mess.

He ate mechanically and got up and went to the communication booths and stood in line. The call went through. There were questions but he evaded the more pointed ones. The detective shape loomed on the screen.

"Relax," said the shape gruffly. "You shouldn't have called from there, but it's all right now that you did. Give it to me again, slower."

He recounted as many details as he could, omitting some that seemed irrelevant.

"It's not your fault," said the detective at last. "Even if you'd called me yesterday, and I don't see how you could, I wouldn't have had anyone watching her so soon. Who would expect her to leave today?"

The detective meditated for a while. "See how it was done. It took a lot of work to get in with you. Violation num-

ber one was that, though you're not supposed to meet anyone you know, she was assigned to the same household. Number two was that the original person was delayed and then notified in time to give Vanelda just one day with you. Neat. I'd say it proves that Personal Contact is infiltrated too, maybe more than Traffic is."

He hadn't thought of it, but it seemed an inescapable conclusion. "Perhaps we oughtn't to talk."

"If they're listening they've got all they need. Besides, how many calls can they monitor at once?" The detective paused. "Stay there. I think you're safe, if only because they wouldn't want anything to happen to you under their jurisdiction.

"Meanwhile I'll get busy tracing Vanelda. Personal Contact knows who she is but it's going to be delicate even without infiltration to worry about. They never did like Traffic poking into their files."

He was beginning to regret having called. The detective seemed determined to make Vanelda the scapegoat. She was involved but she wasn't directing it. "Why do you think she came here?" he asked.

The detective chuckled. "They must have a routine. A fiancée is one person who can get your code, if she's clever, without your being aware of it. They probably have the same setup for any woman they victimize."

He'd thought of that; it was their method of operation. Vanelda was regularly someone's fiancée, and this was the reason he'd been able to overcome his objections to calling. It was not that she had more affairs than the average woman but her reason for having them that was disagreeable. This time though, she was the one who was reluctant to let go.

"As to why she came, I wouldn't know. Except this, she was aware that you'd always wanted to see her. I'd say it falls into the condemned man ate a hearty breakfast theory."

VI

BELLAMY walked toward the gate. The remaining time had passed slowly but the end of the week had finally arrived. He looked up and read the slogan that faced the inside as he neared the exit: *Which of us has not seen his mother's face?* It was a quotation from something, but it seemed misquoted, subtly awry.

He didn't remember where he'd seen it or if he ever had.

He gave his identification and passed through. As he stepped over the line his right to privacy came back and he snapped it on. There was a neutral zone around Sight Center which acted as a buffer between it and the city. He walked through the grayness until he found himself on a street that dead ended on the huge privacy field. For that reason it wasn't as busy as other streets.

This was his home and his heart beat faster for it; he'd never known how much he missed the city until he went away for a while. His pulse was still racing and he frowned; he hadn't missed it this much. Gradually the pounding subsided; it wasn't normal but it was lower than it had been when the city first hit him.

It was bright and he squinted. Perhaps it wasn't the light; it was those shapes and the colors which crawled and flickered over them. They all ought to be gray. No, that had been tried once, he believed, and people complained. Everyone had a right to some personality even if it was manifested only in color.

Did everyone have his trouble when first coming out of Sight Center? The city was overpowering and took getting used to.

His eyes still hurt. He switched to a stronger blob and that helped. The week of isolation had spoiled him, in hearing too. The roar and din, even filtered, was more than he remembered. He reached for nonhearing and found that he had

only one notch in reserve and that he'd better save.

The tokens he'd earned in the Sight Draft were more valuable than their nominal price indicated since they couldn't be bought; they were rationed or, as in his case, awarded for special services to the community. He hadn't intended to use one.

He jingled them in his pocket, decided in favor of it, and went to the street level entrance, dialing his destination and depositing the token. The platform on which he stood sank down to the distribution level and a voice whispered automatically: "There is no room to spare. Please adjust your privacy to the smallest possible dimensions. Oxygen will be administered en route so there is no danger of suffocation."

A short time later he was thrust up to the walk, a block to his place. He slogged toward it, his head fuzzy. He was glad to get home, out of the confusion. He opened the door and snapped off the blob at the threshold.

"Don't forget I'm here," said the glob on the chair. "I'm used to sight stuff but it would look funny if someone came in."

For once he wished the detective would go away. Savagely he switched the field back on, full force. That was too strong and the room whirled around. He diminished the setting.

"That's better. Don't want anyone to get the idea we encourage this sort of thing." The detective coughed. "Knew you were due and thought I'd wait."

The detective moved away from the chair, closer to Bellamy, speaking as if he were afraid of being overheard. The man was a fool if he hadn't put a room-sized nonhearing on the place while Bellamy was gone. Maybe he had—if so he didn't act like it. "Couldn't learn anything about Vanelda. I sent a routine request, anything else would have looked suspicious, to Personal Contact, identifying her as best I could, and they snapped back saying that if I wanted to know about their clients I'd have to get

a directive from the top. I'm not ready for that and I had to abandon that line of search." The detective sighed. "Records. There are just too many records."

TWICE Bellamy had given him important clues and the man seemed to have done nothing with them. If there was anyone in Traffic who was betraying the department that man might be—Bellamy shook his head. That he couldn't believe; there must be a simpler explanation. "I think you're incompetent," he said icily.

It didn't seem to offend. "Think so?" said the detective soothingly. "You don't know how big the city is, one building out of thousands, the first name of a woman.

"What I need is something definite that I can touch and see. These guys follow a pattern and I've got an idea of what it is. All I need is one link; let me get hold of it—" He broke off and when he spoke again his voice was very quiet. "How do you feel?"

"Like hell," said Bellamy.

"Too bad," said the detective. "I was hoping you'd feel all right." He moved across the room. "Get in touch with me if you need to. I'll be around." The door closed behind him before Bellamy realized he was gone.

It was a cryptic remark. Bellamy let his privacy slip and turned out everything else and sat down in a chair when it came into sight. Why had the detective come here at all if he had left without discussing anything important? Bellamy stared at the wall but it didn't come into focus. There was hardly anything he could see.

And that was the one thing the detective had wanted to know, how Bellamy felt. 'Like hell' had satisfied him.

The detective had lied to him from the first, using only as much truth as he had to. If he could believe what anyone said, the people in the building were more correct when they described what he, Bellamy had as incurable. It might be incurable but it didn't mean he couldn't

live with it once he found out just what it was.

The detective had lied, he was certain of it. It wasn't a minor thing; his sight was deteriorating rapidly, and with it the vertigo that the detective had once spoken of was increasing. The detective had expected this to happen. It wasn't a coincidence that he'd been Sight Drafted when he was. It had been arranged. Why? To hasten whatever was happening to him.

Start at the beginning, with the accident to the pedestrian, the unknown man he'd never seen who was also statistical deviate. What had befallen the pedestrian? The same thing that was in store for him.

Someone would come around with that black rodlike weapon, the bald man or perhaps Vanelda since she'd been assigned to him. This time the detective meant to be there too. The detective might feel competent to stop the murderer, but could he stop the murder? Bellamy wasn't confident of it nor did he want to get that close.

Bellamy glowered at the chair that wouldn't stay still, at the walls which wavered in and out of his vision. The detective hadn't asked whether he was willing. He wasn't.

And he didn't have to go along with the plan. He could, in fact, stop it now. He had to remember that.

He got up and thumbed a directory. His vision seemed to improve the longer his privacy was off. He had no illusions about it. He'd have to use his privacy soon and when he did it would be worse. He scowled at the directory, no names, merely the profession and the relative eminence in it.

He dialed, leaving the screen off because he didn't want his field on. "I want an appointment at once," he said when the call went through.

"I'm sorry, the doctor is busy and can't possibly see you for three weeks. Will that be satisfactory?"

It wouldn't. He tried to extend his present reactions into the future. He

could survive that long, but would he be allowed to? A few days was all he had, perhaps not that. "This is an emergency," he said bluntly.

"The patient is seldom a judge of that. However if you feel you must have help at once, contact your nearest Traffic Aid Station and they'll certify you for admittance."

The detective had foreseen this, and he hadn't. He could admire the man's ingenuity if he wasn't on the wrong end of it. Bellamy forced himself to remain calm. "Let me talk to the doctor. Maybe he can tell me what's wrong with me."

"The doctor is extremely busy and doesn't take calls of this nature. He won't attempt a diagnosis without a preliminary examination."

BELLAMY hung up and sat down. There was no use trying another, they'd all be as busy. The detective hadn't been able to follow the leads Bellamy had given him, but he was an expert in hanging onto the one link he did have in his hands.

Bellamy let the problem sift through his mind. His vision was deteriorating rapidly, accompanied by headaches and vertigo. These were the symptoms but the cause behind that was somehow connected with the pedestrian's death—and his own if he wasn't careful. The reasons he didn't understand, and he had to understand if he was going to survive.

There was one out the detective hadn't plugged. Bellamy glanced at the clock and got up reluctantly. At the door he hesitated, but the privacy had to go on. He winced as it enfolded him but it wasn't as bad as he expected. He was certain that he'd be able to get to work.

He went past the rows of machines enclosed in geometric shapes; what they made and how they functioned was mysterious. He didn't know what his own machine did; all that had been revealed to him was a bank of levers which he moved in sequence; something came out the other end, but he never

saw the final product nor the intermediate steps. At first aid he waited in line until he was next. Then he went in.

"I'm just a quack," the technician greeted him. "If it's serious I'll have you carted off to someone who knows what he's doing. But if it's minor, say a finger, contract your privacy and shove your hand through and I'll bandage it. I'm good at bandaging."

"You've got a degree, haven't you?" questioned Bellamy shakily. It was an effort to see, to stay on his feet, but he had to make that effort.

"An *industrial* medical degree, and that's not worth very much," said the first aid technician. "Now what's your trouble? Remember there's a line behind you."

"This may take some time," said Bellamy. "I have difficulty seeing. I don't know why." He did know, somehow it involved the field, or his reaction to it—which was uncertain. "I guess I need a doctor."

"Yes, it's obvious," said the other, standing back and looking at him closely. He went toward the door. "Just a minute."

Presently he came back. "I sent the rest of them to another station. I also contacted your job and told them to get someone to take your place." He settled down opposite Bellamy. "Do you have any idea of what it is?"

"Why—" began Bellamy, and stopped. He'd never heard of anyone similarly afflicted. He knew what the detective had told him, that was all. "Is the privacy field defective?"

"How can it be? It works or doesn't. It can be made stronger or weaker, but it can't be changed at all and still remain a privacy field. It's like gravity—it is or isn't. The laws of physics don't change from person to person.

"There are a few people whom the privacy field affects adversely. It creates a strain in space which alters the properties of that space slightly—electrical charges travel faster or slower, I forget which. Anyway, the results

are the same—the nervous system can't handle it and degenerates, chiefly the optic nerve, though sometimes the eye is distorted. We can surgery the eye back into shape, but what's the use? We can't do anything for the optic nerve."

It was this that the detective had concealed from him. He'd used a little of the truth, as little as he could.

The technician was still speaking. "If you kept on trying to use the field it would destroy you, though it would probably take years. The thing to do is not to use it. There are only two places where you can get away with that, Sight Center, or you may get transferred to one of the outlying factory farms."

Bellamy considered the information. There was a possibility that the first aid man might be wrong, though that was an overly hopeful attitude. "How can I be sure that I react adversely to the privacy field?"

"Tell you," said first aid. "I'm not an actual doctor, but a hundred men have come to me in the last three years with that sheen on their field, the result of interaction between the mind and the mechanism. I *know* what happened to all of them." He paused reflectively. "I think they ought to publicize it, but somehow Traffic doesn't, they won't give out any information. It doesn't affect many, a half of one per cent, but they're entitled to know about it."

Bellamy could see why they didn't. It was a small percentage figure, but the total number was enormous. It would be an indirect attack on the whole system of privacy fields.

"You're lucky you caught it in time," said first aid. "The company will get you transferred. Of course, there's a waiting list, but you'll get in before long, a few years at the most."

WHAT was he supposed to do until then, live in isolation, confined to his room, waiting? Waiting for what? For the bald man or Vanelda to come with the black rod, the detective some-

where in ambush. Bellamy got up. There was nothing for him here.

"Can you take it home?" inquired the technician, thrusting a small package through his privacy. Bellamy took it. "Go home and turn off the field and take a sedative. I'll start wheels revolving; someone will contact you soon. Don't worry, we'll find a place for you to live, even if it is repulsive."

Bellamy stalked through the corridors of the factory. How long had he worked here and he didn't know what it made? Privacy. In this society he was an invalid, because he reacted physically to the field that everyone must have.

He went out into the street, forcing his eyes open savagely. The shapes blurred and only his will steadied them.

And now he knew who those people in the building were—they were like himself! It was these people whom the detective wanted him to betray—one more reason why he couldn't tell Bellamy the truth. These men and women had created a sanctuary in the middle of the city—and *he could live there too, if he knew how to join them.* He had never had to fear these people, it was always the detective who had been his enemy, the detective and the things he stood for.

And that explained Vanelda, why she was so often near. From the beginning she had sympathized, and that had led to a deeper emotion. If she were here now, to lead him to the building through the walks filled with wavering shapes.

He glanced around. He wouldn't recognize her if he saw her, not with her privacy on, and outside she'd have to wear it. For instance the girl behind him was—and his headache expanded to the exact dimensions of his skull, but he could ignore the pain.

The girl was Vanelda.

And that fit into the pattern. Someone had followed the pedestrian too—he was lucky Vanelda had been assigned to him.

His connection was back, but what

was he going to do with it? Her face was grim, unhappy, but also grim. Would she—? If she thought she had to, if she had been told there was no other way out for him. There was that black rod at her belt.

His mind began working. First he had to exchange roles, from followed to follower, and he was an expert at it now. Her field was thin and he couldn't see why someone in the crowd didn't spot her, but apparently mass indifference was working in her favor. He could see her but she had to depend on the instant to instant recognition of the subtle changes that flowed over his privacy.

He stepped around the corner and changed fast; the change hurt but he rode it out. He was behind her. The expression on her face indicated she no longer knew which one of the shapes was his. He watched bewilderment sink in; she had lost him and she knew it.

For all their skill in organizing, in stealing a building away from Traffic and keeping it secret in the middle of the city, they could use a few lessons. It was easy to keep track of her but it wouldn't have been if she'd thought to make her privacy more impenetrable. He kept raising and lowering the strength of his own field, ignoring the pain. He couldn't take chances.

Before he realized it she disappeared into a building—the building. He glanced up. The glob enclosing it was smaller today. He could eliminate anything over fifty stories.

Now what? He had to get in but he was unarmed and they weren't. Would they listen to him? Not readily. Some of them seemed to think that he'd be a handicap to them and he would have to convince them otherwise. It wouldn't do to walk in there unless he was sure he could get out if they didn't accept him.

He paced in front of the building. He'd have to think of something fast.

Someone jostled him, and it hadn't happened to him since he'd first been issued his adult privacy mechanism and

acquired skill in avoiding the shapes around him. "Sorry," muttered the stranger, and no doubt he was. But the headache inside his skull suddenly stopped and at the same instant a more intensive pain exploded on the outside of his head and spread swiftly throughout his consciousness. He didn't fall because another stranger held him up on the other side. He had found a way to get in the building—but it wasn't one of his choice.

VII

AT LENGTH he sat up and held his head. It wasn't likely that anyone on the street had noticed. There had been three overlapping shapes, himself in the middle, and visually there was nothing to indicate that the three were in actual contact. It might have been an accidental juxtaposition.

Bellamy turned off his privacy and set nonhearing at the lowest level. He hadn't kept track of the floor to which they'd taken him and anyway it was unimportant. His head throbbled from the blow that had been skillfully wielded inside his privacy, but he preferred that pain to the headache it displaced.

He examined the room; the walls were thin and transmitted sound easily, but he couldn't seem to break through. The doors were as tough as steel. He'd wanted to talk with them and he was going to get his wish, but he didn't like such a one-sided arrangement. He preferred an escape route if he needed it.

Perhaps he slept. When he awakened there were footsteps in the hall. Even if he could get out of the building there was no place that he could actually escape to. He'd have to be persuasive.

They came in, seven or eight of them, privacy on high. He didn't think it was customary to use privacy in here, but he was getting their special treatment. He didn't like to be stared at but decided he'd have to yield them that advantage.

"She was late," said one, and he could

tell nothing except that he'd heard the voice the first time he had come here. "We were watching from one of the upper floors. She went into her regular code and he was behind her."

Even shape changes could be coded. He hadn't thought of that.

"He was changing rapidly, too rapidly. And there was a man behind him doing the same. We sent several men to bring them both in, which they were able to do when they walked back and forth in front of the door. The other one is a detective from Traffic."

He had forgotten another thing. At street level his changes weren't very noticeable, but from above he'd stick out like a blinking sign. He shouldn't have expected them to rely solely on the strength of the privacy field to keep people out.

And the detective—this is what he'd planned—to follow Bellamy as Bellamy trailed Vanelda.

The detective had foreseen everything correctly except that he too would be captured.

The first time Bellamy had approached the building from the side, a more difficult angle to observe. And then Vanelda hadn't been late and he'd been more calm and his changes had been effected more smoothly. He grimaced at his stupidity and, remembering that his privacy wasn't on, stopped the expression in the middle of his face.

"Now that he's here, what can we do with him? We can't just turn him loose."

He didn't like that kind of a question and it was best to stop it before it went too far. "My purpose in coming here is not what you think. I didn't know the detective was following me, but I intended to tell you about him." He hoped that made an impression; he couldn't be sure of anything with those impassive shapes. "I can't live inside the privacy field and that's why I came, because I know that you can't either. There must be some way I can make myself useful."

SILENCE followed his offer; they didn't think highly of it. "We regret having to tell you but please understand this: the privacy field doesn't affect us physically. We don't like it but we can live with it indefinitely."

He had made a mistake, had assumed too much. If they weren't chronically ill from the field, why had they banded together? It was ominous. If Vanelda were here—but they must have excluded her as too biased in his favor.

"It's difficult for us to survive," said another. "We can't afford cripples of any kind, and in a sense you are. You'd be a liability."

"And remember that, though you feel better now, in a few weeks you'll begin to react to the field enclosing the building. It's more dispersed in the center—but the time will come—and then what can we do with you?"

That too was true though he had overlooked it. There was, essentially, no place in the city where he could survive. He had foolishly forced them into a position where, for their own safety they'd have to eliminate him.

He knew what their decision would have to be. But maybe with their unknown resources they could find some place for him. There was no reason why they should try—except Vanelda.

At first she had been arbitrarily assigned to him, but she had allowed herself to become emotionally entangled and now she would help him if she could. And now, as always, she was there when he needed her most. She hadn't been excluded from the jury that was weighing him. She snapped into sight.

It was more than an incredible coincidence that she should come to his aid at exactly the right psychological moment. "Vanelda," he said. "There must be some place in which I won't be a liability. It may take thought to determine where, but don't you think I deserve the chance?"

"Vanelda," mused someone. "Where is Vanelda?"

"There."

"He recognized the peculiar configuration of her privacy field." The nameless shape laughed, but it was shaky.

"What field?" he said bluntly.

There was an uneasy silence. "Describe her for us," said someone.

And then he knew, as they were beginning to suspect, that her privacy was on but for him it didn't exist—that he could look through it any time he wanted. He described her for them and there was no doubt.

There was a sigh that came from all of them.

"I don't know how you do it," said the man with the gray pointed beard and the hands that were still dirty. Now he could see them all. "I have a theory—but never mind—it can wait."

The bearded man smiled and came closer. "You were mistaken about what's wrong with you. We all were, and Traffic too. It's not merely that you're looking through our fields; it's also the strongest privacy we can create." He dropped his hand to the mechanism and turned it off. As far as Bellamy could tell it made very little difference.

THE bearded man was a doctor, that much Bellamy had learned. He raised his hands to his temple; there was a puncture, microscopic, but he could feel it. The doctor had said he wanted a direct visual examination and he'd gotten it. The doctor glanced up. "No degeneration of the optic nerve; that's the most important. Your eyes are all right too." He straightened up and began putting the instruments away.

"My equipment is rather primitive but later there'll be time for more work on you. I want to find out whether it's a learned response or a mutation that causes it.

"Meanwhile this is what I think. How does anyone see an object? The actual image falls upside down on the retina. It is reinverted mentally by a process we all learn at an early age.

"Now—how does the privacy field or

sight scrambler work? The last name suggests it. It allows light to penetrate undisturbed but leaving the field, light is scattered. All wave-lengths equally? Now I'm beginning to doubt it. Our physicists can work on the problem.

"With you it's different. One of two things happen and I'm not able to choose at the moment. You may select relatively undistorted wave lengths, and I don't know which band it is, and build the image out of that. Or, and here is where I'm getting in deep, perhaps you take the actual distorted, scattered image and, jigsaw puzzle fashion, assemble it in your mind much as other minds automatically turn the picture right side up. Or there may be other ways I'm missing."

"But why did I think—" began Bellamy.

"Psychological. I don't know when it started, as a child, or perhaps just recently, but you could see those people—and your cultural conditioning said you couldn't. In order to conform you had to build an enormous emotional block and it spilled out somewhere, in your case into the symptoms that the detective suggested. You manufactured reactions that duplicated those appearing with the real illness for which there is no cure.

"But the conditioning broke down whenever Vanelda was near. You wanted to see her and you didn't give a damn what the culture said about it. The only time you should have been able to see her was that once in Sight Center. Normally we all go around with a very strong privacy so we won't be stopped and questioned."

And so he'd always been able to follow her when it should have been impossible. But more explanations were needed. "Where's the detective?"

"The detective," said the doctor. "We're trying to decide what to do. And I've got to get back to my practice. Vanelda will take over."

Not long ago they were deciding with him. The detective wasn't a bad sort.

He was doing his duty and he'd honestly thought there was no way Bellamy could be helped. If he had been able to capture these people he probably would have used Traffic's influence to get Bellamy placed in Sight Center or one of the factory farms sooner than Bellamy would otherwise have been admitted.

"We've never killed anyone, if that's what you're thinking," said Vanelda. "They determine their own fate."

He looked up at her. They were a queer group and he couldn't guess what they were. The fact that Vanelda belonged was in their favor. Still. . . .

"How many people are there on earth?" Vanelda asked.

He stopped. "I don't know."

"No one does, not even Traffic, though they pretend to. They'll give you a figure if you're authorized to ask for it, but it's a bad guess, getting worse as years go by."

"But they have records. It takes time but they keep track of everything."

"Do they?" she asked. "They have to have records of everything. Do you know how much space it takes to store old ones, even micro-sized or in the memory unit of a machine? And the space is subtracted from that available for humans. And so once a year or less, it used to be every ten or twenty years, they cancel everything and begin anew. Their own philosophy compels them to, because they need the space."

"The population has never stopped increasing."

"But won't the excess be taken care of when we reach the stars?"

"If we find a truly habitable planet, a hundred or a thousand years from now. But every day there's increasing pressure to produce more food for more people who leave less space to do anything in. Research is dying. If we keep on this way we'll never find that star."

"One more thing. When America was discovered, what happened to the population of Europe?"

"It increased in spite of the migration." He turned the problem over.

"And so, to reverse the trend, and using the confusion of records, you've infiltrated Traffic—"

"We've infiltrated very little," she said. "But you're right. On privacy no one knows whether we belong there or not, and we've trained ourselves to imitate officials. We alter records as much as we dare. Nobody can trust his memory, the figures are too vast; he must use what's in front of him. That's how I assigned myself to Sight Center, how we're able to get and keep control of this building."

He nodded dazedly; a bold trained person could do it. "You can imitate the privacy of an official, but that's not all. The records are protected."

"How much protection can there be when everything must be hauled out and burned or erased once a year? Availability is the prime concern and protection consists in surrounding them with privacy fields. We can't alter what we don't see. Or we can, but it will be detected."

THAT was the job they had for him.

Actually no privacy field existed for him unless he wanted it to—and so he would have access to anything. But there was another aspect he hadn't seen. "Then you people can see through privacy too?" He had thought he was unique.

"Not really. We have to use a device which works against a weak field. And that's limited us. The most important figures, long range birth control, are heavily protected and we've been unable to get through. But you can, and work in perfect safety."

They had operated cleverly considering their limitations. There were personal reasons too, but he could accept their program without reservations. "I'm not a scientist, but I'll join you—especially since I know I can help."

She smiled naturally and without self-consciousness, and he knew those personal reasons were still functioning. "You knew you had to say you'd join

us, didn't you? But we weren't worried." She paused. "But as for scientists, not many of us are, though we need them. They'll come as their research programs grind down. Ultimately they'll carry most of the burden because they're best equipped to."

Workmen, technicians, professionals, scientists, officials, housewives. If not scientists, which among them had started it?

She saw his expression and took his hand. "It's easier to show you than explain. Ask yourself this: who is most stifled by this so-called privacy? Not who can do the most to eliminate it, but who would feel it first?"

He was shaking his head when he came to the place he recognized. It was the room in which she had been standing semi-nude surrounded by queer technicians. It was these which had made him associate the whole group with scientists. The doctor had been there but he was a professional—and *there she was again*. The light went on and he could see the mistake. It was just a model of her, badly made. The arms had been broken off.

Though it was crudely done it was also an intense experience to look at it. No reproduction he had seen had ever had that effect. "What's the model for?" he asked.

She laughed. "It's a statue. The doctor made it out of clay, another reason why he joined us, the first reason being that, as a doctor he saw what the privacy field was doing to so many people.

"But as for this, there was an original but it was destroyed because it was lewd and it took up space. A few pictures of it survived because they're so small and there must be some link with the past. I posed for it because everyone decided I looked like the original Venus de Milo."

The last few words told him. "Artists! You're all artists!"

"Most of us, after our regular work. How long can sculptors do freeforms and painters work on abstracts without

once returning to the human form or even seeing it? As for musicians, where is there a quiet place they can perform, assuming anyone will come to listen?"

Now he knew how these people forged the code on power discs. There are some techniques so old and forgotten that they are brand new. They had simply painted the new code over the old, so cleverly that, except for an accident, it would never have been discovered. "And what are you?" he asked.

"Something you never heard of. I'm an actress."

HE HADN'T ever heard of it, but he had read. An actress was someone who performed in front of people—and that was why he hadn't recognized her as his fiancée: she'd changed her voice, it took only a slight change to mislead him. And it was why they wanted the empty building, not just for safety: they needed a place to work.

His thoughts were interrupted as a door was flung open and a man dashed toward the stairway. Evidently there were other art forms he'd never heard of. "Who was that?" he asked uneasily.

"I suppose it's the detective," she answered calmly. "We asked him to join; he could help us in Traffic. But he's a fanatic and thinks everything's right with the world he lives in. He doesn't want to change it."

He stared at her puzzledly. "Isn't he escaping? We can't let him get back to Traffic." He saw the black rodlike weapon on the table and snatched it up, starting after the detective who was now clattering down the stairs.

"Put it down," she said. "It won't hurt anyone."

"But you used it on the pedestrian."

"True, but it didn't harm him. That's the instrument we use when we're altering records; it breaks down weak privacy fields and that's all. Some of our electronic experts built it. If you're interested I'll show you what it did on that one occasion." She led him to the far wall.

There was a painting. It was the accident. He, Bellamy, was there with the weak privacy field with that sheen on it, and others, more solid yet shapeless, streaming past him. The roadway glistened with blinding streaks of speed and one man had wandered out into it, the field all but melted away from him. Bellamy looked at the face and looked away. He'd been close to the same thing himself.

"The bald man painted it from memory. We think he's a good artist, though he's also an electronics expert," she said. "Before he could paint it he had to see it. He followed the man, knowing it would happen and knowing too that there was nothing he could do to help. It's a worthwhile picture of what it's like under the privacy field."

He shook it out of his head. "The detective is getting away," he insisted.

"Is he? They left him his field, though he's not using it at the moment, but before they offered him a chance to join us they took away his nonhearing."

They were impractical artists and this proved it. If they had taken away his privacy instead, the detective might not have braved the consequent exposure. He glared furiously. Impractical, but he liked them and they didn't seem to know when they were endangered.

"Twenty flights of stairs to run down, and he will go down them because he thinks we'll stop the elevators. He's due to reach the street level soon. If you still doubt whether we know what we're doing you can watch him."

She was in no hurry though he was. At the window she handed him an instrument he'd never seen. "Binoculars, old, but no one uses them because no one wants to see," she said. "I can't tell you how to look through their fields. Just remember that you can."

He lifted the binoculars and all he could see were the usual shapeless shapes. He concentrated and broke through their fields. People. No. Some of them were less. Naked and dirty, or clothed, but the clothing was torn and

patched, not because they had to wear rags but because they were indifferent and no one could see. There was a couple that had come together in a backwash, in an eddy of the pedestrian stream and one was old and enfeebled and the girl was young but—he shifted the glasses.

Mostly it was their faces. Some were shouting and though he couldn't hear he could imagine. Some lifted their eyes and were crying; one carried a knife and stalked the man in front of him, unaware that the other was a walking weaponshop. Farther away there was a girl with a shard of glass, dabbling her hands in the blood of her breast.

"There he is," said Vanelda. "He's out of the building and is crossing the intersection on the overpass. He thinks if he can get to the other side it will be safe to call Traffic."

BELLAMY didn't want to look, but he couldn't help it. "Why?" he asked, knowing that she would guess what he meant.

"They call it privacy," she said. "It's nothing but hostility. No, I can't see it, but I have, other times. The privacy field is tearing away at their nervous systems, even those who are supposed to be strong enough to stand it. And it's more than that."

"The detective's not like they are. I've talked to him."

"Maybe he wasn't; you never actually saw him," she said. "Look at him now. If you want to understand what it's like without nonhearing, and he hasn't any, turn your own off and lean out."

He reached for the switch and the noise took him and shook him. Every sonic vibration in the city hit him, combined and recombined, echoed and amplified, shouts and scuffling and machinery grinding. It came at him. It pried open the channels of his ears and wouldn't let them close. Harmonics were tearing at him. He knew now why buildings swayed though there was no breeze and why trees and flowers had to be protected and allowed to rest. The muscles

of his face jerked and his skin was heating up. His head seemed to be—and then it didn't. Vanelda had turned on his nonhearing in time.

"You've got to be careful, even twenty stories up," she said. "And he's down near the source of it. Watch him. This is what he's rushing to save as a way of life."

He turned the binoculars on the detective, who was a little man spinning around. Blood was leaking out of his ears. He crashed into a well dressed man who slashed at him with a cane, spit, and hurried on. He was a courageous man, the detective, and he knew his duty and he struggled on though his eyes were clotted and he gyrated back and forth across the walk. He was nearing the summitt of the overpass when he crashed into the rail and clung to it.

His leap, however, was voluntary, if by then any volition was left.

He fell directly into the path of the oncoming vehicular traffic. It was only a few feet down and it was not the fall that did it. For an instant there was a blob, a thin red blob splotted with gray, shapeless as all blobs properly are, as the tires rolled over and flattened him and the cars didn't stop. No one had seen anything. And still the cars came on. The wet blob dried rapidly. In a few minutes there was nothing at all, merely fine dust that rose into the air and settled into eyes and was breathed in by the billions in the city, all cozily encased in blindness and silence.

"The city swallowed him," said Vanelda slowly, drawing him back into her arms. "Come away, darling. There's work to be done."



Featured in Our Next Issue

THE GOLDEN HELIX

A Novel of Other Worlds

By THEODORE STURGEON

and

TIME PAWN

A Novel of the Future

By PHILIP K. DICK



EMSH

MANHUNT

By

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

*He was after a fugitive
from justice—but the man
he found was . . . himself!*

THE bullet ploughed into the sand with an angry hiss. Startled, Oakland leapt back, then flattened himself. With the acrid bite of sand in his nostrils he struggled for an instant against a resentful curiosity which would have reduced his chances of survival to the vanishing point.

He was too tired to be frightened—too incredulous and appalled. But even a man with a charmed life has to be careful when his luck starts to change for no reason at all.

Jim Oakland's luck had been changing steadily all afternoon. First the barren sand dunes had misled and deceived him, assuming patterns seldom

encountered on Mars; the familiar landmarks were obscured by whorls and flurries of an oddly infuriating pattern, and the heat had become intolerable, a drain on body and mind. Then, with every step a torment, his knapsack had burst wide open, and he had been forced to repair it with sun-blistered hands.

Worst of all, the Old City itself had changed. He couldn't even see the rocket launching platforms where he had once played as a child.

There was blowing sand everywhere. It filled the hollows and windy places, and hung suspended in the air like a floating shroud. The great power turbines were crumbling into rust, and the vacuum supply tubes which lined the deserted streets were filled with swarms of enormous, yellow-bodied flies.

Oakland had heard the buzzing of the flies during all the years of his childhood, but never so persistently as now. It almost drowned out the ominous drone of the second bullet, the spanking thud of the third.

The mound which shielded him was far from bullet-proof. In the shadow of a crumbling wall he cursed softly and waited for his adversary to show himself, stunned by the paradox of being under siege in a city that had died.

He still felt no real fear, only a puzzled resentment that someone should play a cat-and-mouse game with him in the city of his birth. Someone who loved that city as much as he did, perhaps—or hated it with a consuming hatred. Someone who resented intruders and wanted privacy desperately enough to murder for it.

Vengeance? Impossible! He had no enemies here. But that didn't change the fact that bullets were ploughing into the sand only a yard from his head, and suddenly one shattered the wall at his back. The blast seemed timed to enerve him, and the crash of the falling debris snapped him to action. He wanted to get his hands on that sniper—just once.

Cautiously he raised himself and

stared out over the sandy waste. Forty feet away loomed the entrance to an abandoned mine shaft. It was a tangled mass of wreckage, but framed for an instant in the darkness was a shape that bobbed and weaved about and seemed the opposite of mechanical.

OAKLAND felt as if a hundred eyes were watching him, wondering what his next move would be. Should he risk a leap? Ordinarily a man who caught the glint of sunlight on a gun barrel and hurled himself straight toward almost certain death would be acting against all reason. But Oakland hated inertia. Sweating it out in a stalemate simply did not appeal to him.

He rose automatically, muscles tensing.

His leap when it came was like an uncoiled spring. He shot forward with the prowess of a man to whom physical fitness was the first law of life.

The leap carried him almost to the edge of the wreckage. He hit the sand as softly as a cat, straightened and plunged forward with a shout that echoed through the city like a thunderclap. As the ruins rolled the echo back a blast of deadly gunfire barely missed him. It singed his face, blew away his sun-shield, and whirled him furiously about.

He fell to his knees, shook his head stubbornly, and crawled forward until he was staring directly into the mine shaft, realizing that his recklessness had completely betrayed him.

Before him in the gloom were eyes narrowed and cold, above the barrel of an energy weapon aimed directly at his heart. Facing him was a gaunt scarecrow of a man at least eighty years old, his lips chafed by wind and rain, his snow-white hair plastered to his forehead by sweat and grime.

He wore the patched space-leather of a first-generation colonist, and to Oakland he seemed to be a man linked in some mysterious fashion to the supernatural.

Yet Oakland was not deceived. The man in the shaft was a flesh-and-blood reality, as dangerous as any young man could have been walking in the open with an implacable will to destruction guiding his every move.

There was no margin of safety left, for Oakland was facing at point-blank range a weapon that could take away his life. The fact that he was holding a trump card was no guarantee that the man in the shaft would not think that he was bluffing.

Even if he played the card well a man with such power to destroy might blast in blind hatred, scornful of retribution. It was an even risk, but Oakland knew that he would have to take it.

"It isn't as simple as you think," he warned, in a strained whisper. "I've a micro-transmitter right here in my hand. At a word from me these ruins will be blown sky high!"

The face in the shaft came closer. Sunlight slanted down over it, bringing the features into harsh relief.

"So you went and undermined the city!" came in a despairing voice. "The first city on Mars, the real city. You undermined it, and are going to blow it up."

"We had no choice," Oakland said. "You can't keep a legend alive forever. Is that why you tried to kill me, old fool?"

"No!" The voice was suddenly vehement with denial. "I'm not a murderer! I thought you were after me."

"After you?" Oakland's eyes grew probing. "Just why should you think that?"

"Look at me!" the old man said. "Take a good look. Don't you know who I am?"

"Martin Steele!" he whispered, as recognition came.

"A man with a price on his head," the old man said. "For fifty years a fox with no hole to hide in, no place to rest his head."

"Martin Steele!"

"Once I went to the New City," Steele

said. "I went at night and I walked along the streets like a man with the right to hold up his head. Not one to be hunted, but to be greeted with respect."

The old man threw back his head and chuckled, but there was no real mirth in his stare.

"There was a big show going on," he said, the veins on his neck standing out like whipcords. "A moving picture show. We had them seventy years ago on Earth when I was a boy. I can still remember how the women looked on the big screen. We had television, sure. But the big screen lasted right up until the first passenger-carrying rocket took off for Mars.

"So in the New City I saw this picture. Nothing fancy about the title. Just 'Martin Steele.' They didn't call me an outlaw and a murderer. They didn't say I couldn't raise my glass and say to my fellow man: 'Hello, friend! It's a nice morning, isn't it? Sun's bright, and we're not fighting like wildcats any more to hold what we've won from the desert and the nickel-rock landslides."

IN THE shadows Oakland's eyes sought Steele's fingers, noticed that they now were wound less tightly about the weapon in his clasp.

"Outside they didn't call me a hunted man," Steele went on. "Fifty years is a long time. So I went inside and in the darkness saw myself as a lad of twenty-two. Fastest gun on all Mars. The kid who could glide away and disappear without getting himself all chewed up inside."

"I saw that picture two nights ago," Oakland said.

A slow flush of gratification crept up over the old man's cheekbones.

"You saw it? I'm glad. They sure made a mighty fine figure out of me. They showed me killing in self-defense and in self-defense only. And so help me—it was true. I never in my life shot a man down in cold blood."

Oakland's eyes narrowed, watching

the gun dip lower, watching the scarred old fingers grow lax.

He was not deceived. He had seen it happen time and time again. A man at the limit of his endurance forgetting to be cautious as he mind returned to the grandeur of the past.

A false move and the gun would roar. A false move—and there'd be another grave marker where he had played as a child. He could almost see the desert-scoured lettering as he returned Steele's stare:

JAMES OAKLAND

BORN 2031

DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY 2063.

The line of duty! What absurd tricks the mind could play. A man couldn't be buried in a city marked for destruction. Oakland forced himself to concentrate on the fatal flaw in the armor which Steele had worn for fifty years.

Steele liked to talk about the past. All old men did, but in Steele the urge was sharpened by loneliness. A trump card if played close to the chest—

It was as if Steele had plucked some hypnotic flower of the desert night distilling a fragrance which sent him careening back to his youth—plucked it to shed its petals one by one.

It was a fatal weakness in so old a man. His eyes sharp with purpose, Oakland told himself that if Steele went right on talking the gun would sink lower, the tired old hands grow palsied.

But Steele startled him by challenging him at a vital point.

"Why are you going to blow up the Old City?" he demanded. "What kind of a man are you? You'd do better to buy yourself a coffin."

"If you went to the New City you must have heard the talk," Oakland said. "There were debates, discussions. On Earth it was done too. You can't be too sentimental about the past. There are rude beginnings in every great culture when men have to fight and kill to stay alive. Sometimes they have to resort to violence which can't be glorified."

"Talk like that doesn't mean much," Steele said. "Sure, we had to fight to stay alive. But judging from that moving picture we didn't do so badly."

"Fifty years ago you laid the groundwork for a legend," Oakland said. "The youth of today glorifies you because youth is naturally adventurous and would like to live as you did without killing anyone. What they forget is that when you fought to stay alive you were a killer by choice."

"Not by choice," Steele protested. "That's where you're wrong."

"You 'defended' yourself ruthlessly—with cruelty and cunning. You were an outlaw when other men managed to live within the framework of the law."

"Son, they took away my land. The respectable element you praise didn't like me because I was independent and hotheaded and just a bit reckless. But I wasn't really so different. I wanted to see the first colony on Mars become great just as much as they did."

"You're still wanted for murder!" Oakland said, his eyes accusing.

"After fifty years, son, a man's memory grows dim. But I do know this. I was never a murderer."

"You asked me why I've been sent here to blow up fifty square miles of ruins," Oakland said. "I'll tell you. They are monuments of a past that is best forgotten. On Earth we made the mistake of glorifying the past. We lived so much in the past that the future became a nightmare.

"Here on Mars we intend to go forward more boldly. If there were not laws prohibiting it, tourists would flock here by the thousands. Youth has a tendency to idealize the primitive. The decision to destroy this city was made because it has served its purpose and is just dead wood blocking the way to progress."

"Dead wood?" Steele's eyes flared in protest. "Son, I saw this city grow right out of the desert with the sap of life pulsing in its veins. When a tree grows too fast big ridges form on it. Men get scared of it and move away from it.

Maybe it dies a bit. But the heart of it never dies. If you let it alone it stays alive enough to send out green shoots for a thousand years."

Indignation did it—not weariness, but the urge to defend something so big that weapons became an insult to human dignity. Steele put his gun down and started to get to his feet, using both hands to gesture with.

Oakland was stunned by the simplicity of his victory. He had anticipated a struggle, a life-and-death grapple on the sand with a man who had killed too often to be squeamish about one more murder. Now he need only lean forward and pick up the gun to make Steele his captive. He moved quickly. Training the weapon on Steele, he said in a voice that trembled a little, "Raise your arms—and don't try any tricks!"

For an instant Steele stared at the gun as if he had no recollection at all of having relinquished it.

It was a tragic moment for both of them. Into Steele's eyes came a sudden glint of compassion, of sympathy for the man who had taken him captive.

"I never really expected you to understand, son," he said. "In fifty years almost all of a man dies. When you bring him to judgment after all that time you're punishing him for the crimes of a stranger. You might say he remembers how that stranger felt and thought and acted, but memory's too thin a thread to hang a judgment on."

"I'm sorry," Oakland said, choosing his words with care, "but to me murder is a scarlet thread so woven into the fabric of a man's destiny that nothing can make it fade."

"It's all right, son," Steele said, wearily. "You just happened along fifty years too late."

HE STOOD blinking in the desert glare, his arms upraised and his shoulders held straight. Incredibly scrawny his arms seemed, with the veins standing out like knotted cords. There was no hint of the power that had

made him a hero—and a fugitive.

"Where are you taking me?" Steele asked.

"To the New City," Oakland said. "Tomorrow we'll start out."

"And tonight?"

"We'll camp here. It's as good a place as any."

A look of desperation came to Martin Steele's eyes. "You won't give the signal, son? You'll give the Old City one more week of life? You can use my capture as an excuse—"

Oakland looked down at his feet, firm-planting on the soil which had nourished his childhood.

"We'll see," he said.

"If your mind is made up it doesn't matter where we camp," Steele said.

"No," Oakland agreed.

"There are a few places I'd like to see just once more, son."

"For instance?"

"First year we put up a ball park. I'd like to stand in the pitcher's box, and pick up a stone and hurl it. Then I'd like to sit down at a table in the New Mars Cafe. I'd like to turn on the three-dimensional image projector, and see Molly Minton dance again."

"Molly Minton?"

"She was dust when you were a babe in arms, son!"

Oakland shrugged wearily. "Well—we know where we stand now. We can make a tour of the ruins if you wish."

Thus it was that two men separated by a gulf of time moved forward into the twilight of a city that had lost control of its own destiny, yet somehow seemed to know that it still lived and could take pride in its native sons. . . .

THEY had been walking toward the city's edge in silence when the old man looked pleadingly at Oakland and said. "You haven't forgotten the promise you made me? You said we'd go to the New Mars Cafe and see Molly Minton dance again."

"If it would give you pleasure," Oakland said. "It's all right with me."

"You knew her?" Oakland asked, his mouth suddenly dry. "You knew and talked to a woman as beautiful as that?"

"I held her in my arms," Steele said. For a hypnotic moment Molly Minton seemed to be dancing for Steele alone.

She glided and jetied and appeared to float in the air, her toes pointing downward and her arms flung wide. Her eyes were wide and disarming, the eyes of a child indifferent to passion or remorse.

There was a faint click, and she was gone. The light dimmed and vanished, and the image projector loomed again through the shadows with a faint gleaming, a lifeless automaton demanding the homage of another coin.

Oakland sat staring at his companion in silent awe. The old man's features had changed, and for an instant he seemed almost young again, with a look in his eyes that took him out of the pioneer breed and reclassified him.

He looked like a youngish man whom a woman might well have taken joy in tormenting to add a bright feather to her career as a temptress. He looked as well like the kind of man who would be capable of making a complete fool of himself over one woman while a dozen others fought over him.

A young romantic fool, unaware of his great gifts of body and mind, carrying within himself the seeds of his own destruction.

"It's curious, son," Steele murmured, "how a man's entire life can hinge on a moment's recklessness. I've always believed that for every gift of nature something must surely be taken away."

Steele waved his hand, as if to brush away a memory that had returned at the wrong time.

"If a man has been given strength and health he will never know what it means to watch the sun come up from a solitary cot of pain, or how beautiful the world can seem when life is ebbing fast and every precious moment must be lived to the full. If he has been given wealth he loses the joy of hewing out

for himself an empire in the wilderness. And if a woman has been given beauty—"

Steele raised his eyes and looked straight at the image projector. "If a woman has been given beauty there is a very great danger that she will lose her soul."

Oakland knew that Steele could not be stopped now, that there was something on his mind that was crying for release.

"Tell me about her," he urged.

STEELE said wearily. "It was fifty years ago. But time doesn't ease the pain much—when something brings it back. I had my own plot of land, my own house. I could have built for the future and had no trouble with the law. But when I met Molly Minton every plan I had built itself around her and I could imagine no future apart from her.

"I was an awkward young fellow, clumsy in the presence of women, but I'd never met a woman like Molly before. I said to myself: 'Here's a woman I could stand with against the world.' Her life had been all struggle, all pain. There was sordidness in it and violence, but I didn't care about that. To me she was something wonderful and good."

The New Mars Cafe wasn't crowded. Dust covered all of the chairs and tables, and the shining appurtenances where men weary of struggle and frustration had slipped coins into narrow slots and watched women dance whose gift of beauty had once seemed as inexhaustible as light and flame.

They sat down at a table near the door, festooned with cobwebs.

"Sorry I can't order drinks, son," Steele said. "Molly Minton deserves a treat for her great gift of betrayal."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Oakland said.

"You will in a minute, son. May I get up?"

"Go ahead," Oakland said.

Steele rose and walked to a three-dimensional image projector that still glittered with a blue metallic sheen after

fifty years of neglect. He fumbled in his pocket for a coin and miraculously found one. Oakland watched with fascinated curiosity as shaking fingers dropped the coin into a slot that should have been clogged with rust.

Steele returned to the table and re-seated himself. There was a sudden whirring, and a shaft of light poured from the projector and coalesced into a cone of radiance a yard from the table.

Into the radiance came a gliding human form, solidifying out of the darkness as if summoned by Martin Steele's nod.

And Molly Minton danced again. It was unbelievable, but a woman who had been dust for half a century danced in three-dimensional splendor, her arms upraised and her head thrown back.

"Look at her hair, son," Steele murmured. "A river of gold it was—and gold could have bought every strand of it."

Looking steadily at the projector, Steele tightened his lips.

"I asked her to marry me. We'd set a date for the wedding, and were making plans. Then one evening I decided to go into town and celebrate my last week as a bachelor.

"When you're dead sober you can weigh and measure rumors. But when you're celebrating a little rumor can get you so worked up you've got to see for yourself.

"She never expected me to call that night. I remember how the door looked. It was open a crack, and light was streaming out into the hall. I heard laughter and a man's voice saying: 'As soon as you get the property in your own name, hon, we'll find a way to take care of him.'"

"I didn't wait to hear more. I kicked the door open and I walked into that room with my hands held straight out before me.

"I'm giving you an even chance!" I said. "Look at me, pay attention. Right at this moment I'm starting to draw."

"He was a big, muscle-bound sort of man, the kind of man who ordinarily would have stopped to ponder. But when he saw the look on my face he went for his gun so fast I half-regretted my generosity.

"We fired together.

"I'll never forget how she looked when she saw him lying dead at my feet. How she must have loved him! He was her kind, and killer animals run in packs and mate together. At that moment I was a Miller animal too. But I had no desire to mate with her. After what I had heard I belonged to a different breed entirely."

Steele suddenly relaxed at the table. The tormented look went out of his eyes, and he smiled almost light-heartedly.

"From that moment on I was a hunted man. But I was a wiser man in a good many ways—a man better able to look after himself. How would you like a little advice on how to be successful with women?"

Oakland stared. "Go right ahead," he said.

"First get over the idea that any man can really understand a woman," Steele said. "No man can ever understand a woman. The worst thing you can do is to deliberately try to please one. It's always hit or miss, let the chips fall where they may."

Steele made a motion as if he were scattering chips at random. "You can never know when you're pleasing a dame. You've simply got to take the gamble of being yourself and hoping she'll like you. The best way is not to care at all. Be careless with them, son, and they'll as likely as not end up in your arms."

Oakland suddenly found himself relaxing, with the geniality of a tired wayfarer warmed by wine.

For just an instant Oakland glanced down again at Steele's hands. To his amazement the hands were in motion.

Steele caught Oakland's wrist in an iron grip and twisted it savagely. Desperately Oakland tried to wrench

free, but even as he tugged and cursed the old man scored another victory. He reached across the table and regained possession of his gun—snatched it up so effortlessly it seemed almost to float into his clasp.

Instantly Oakland brought his free hand down in a chopping motion with all his strength behind it. But Steele's wrist absorbed the shock, and his fingers stayed locked with Oakland's. It was then that Oakland discovered that the grip of a mastiff was a paltry thing measured against human endurance.

The grip held and held—then relaxed so fast Oakland could only blink helplessly and curse his own stupidity. For an instant he felt like a man betrayed by some monstrous irony of fate into bargaining for space at his own funeral.

As Steele backed away his eyes spoke for him. *One step nearer, and you'll be a dead fool*, the eyes said.

There was a hitch to it somewhere. Somehow, Oakland knew that. Now he remembered—of course! He'd removed the firing pin from the gun almost automatically, slipping it into his pocket with hardly a thought. His memory had betrayed him, but not his instincts.

Oakland rose and kicked back his chair.

"Better not try it, son! Take one step toward me—and I'll be watching another man die."

"You'll either give me that gun, or I'll take it from you."

"Don't make me kill you, boy!" Steele's eyes were suddenly pleading. "I never had a son of my own and for a moment there—"

"You thought of me as a son?"

OAKLAND stared, wondering, scanning Steele with his eyes as if probing for something unbelievable beneath his weathered exterior.

He wasn't sure he believed in souls. But if there was some inward dimension to a human being you couldn't see on the surface it appeared now to be shining forth from Steele.

Unfortunately there could be no retreat from duty. A man sworn to uphold the law had a right to test every move and countermove of an adversary, just to keep the record straight. It had to be kept straight with Steele.

"You heard what I said!" Oakland challenged. "I want that gun *now!*"

He took a slow step forward—then another.

"Damn you to hell, son!" Steele cried, and flung his gun to the floor.

It clattered and rolled almost to the table before Oakland realized that Steele was now a broken man.

Steele staggered to the table and sat down. He leaned forward, cradled his head in his arms, and started to sob.

After a while he quieted down.

Steele went to sleep finally, without moving, without even looking up to see if Oakland had picked up the gun. He slept the sleep of sheer exhaustion, a yard from where he had once crushed a slender pale girl in his arms.

Oakland went to another table to write the note.

You crossed space to another planet, he wrote, and you built a world no man can shake. You were of all breeds, and each in his own way was a shining light, and it was given to each to wear human dignity like a crown. If you wore that dignity for an hour you built well enough to be pardoned much—perhaps all.

It is not for us to judge the Earth-born, O Pioneers.

It is not for me to judge you, Martin Steele. Go your way in freedom. If I can make my advice prevail: the Old City will be preserved.

Jim Oakland

Oakland folded the note and slipped it gently under Steele's elbow, taking care not to rouse him. Then he walked into the cool Martian twilight.

From somewhere in the distance the wind resumed its eerie drumming, blowing fine sand in all directions. ● ● ●



He was wrestling with Max and trying to clear

LEGACY

a novelet

by

ROGER DEE

I

FOR two years you've been wondering about the new experimental satellite station that Government and Spaceways Limited are building off Luna. You've picked up vague mentions of the project in the newlines and telecasts and you've heard the scuttlebutt that floats around, but you've never had a word of real information. Neither has anyone else you know.

And that makes you more curious than

Nobody thought that Mallory gave a damn about anybody

Illustration by
ART SUSSMAN



his soporific needle when I finally got to them

ever. You want to know what they're doing up there with your tax money, and you want to know why.

I've been waiting for two years to tell you.

What they're building up there won't mean much if I give it to you offhand, so I'll let that wait. The *why* of it goes back a couple of years to 2021, beginning with the trouble that broke out aboard the Marsbound *Helina*.

That trouble started, not from the malfunctioning of some specialized mechanical equipment as you might expect, but from the old unpredictable human element itself. Specifically, Max Dunbar cracked up with a case of free-fall horrors and did his maniac best to wreck the ship.

It could have happened to me. I had made four straight Martian hauls as second pilot of the *Helina*, which is one

else, but he gave them all something to remember. . . .

flight more than Spaceways medics recommend, and I was too edgy for comfort when the run began. But seasoned personnel is next to impossible to replace, and this particular flight had to go through because it ferried antibiotics to Mars where the colonists had developed an epidemic of desert-rot that had to be checked or else.

So there really wasn't a choice for any of the three of us, though of course another flight or so wouldn't have bothered Bass Mallory any.

Max Dunbar had made only his three prescribed runs, but Max had more imagination and less free-fall conditioning than I'd had, and the combination made every trip rough for him. He had showed signs of going under at turnover time on our last flight; Bass and I had stood ready to give him a shot of *soporif* along with our passengers, and had held off only because the dosage would have looked bad on his record.

The three-trip limit didn't apply to Bass Mallory, for good reasons. Bass was an anomaly, immune to routine gravity-drops and to free-fall strain at turnover time; he was born and trained, the first by accident and the second by design, on old Satellite Station One, and he wasn't subject to the same weaknesses as the rest of us. Bass was only twenty-six, two years older than Max and myself, but he had been first pilot of the *Helina*—captain, if the title has any meaning to a three-man complement—for five years. At twelve flights to the year he had made some sixty flights in a row, and never muffed a run—or made a planetfall, or a friend.

Bass was different from the rest of us in more than his immunity to free fall. His friends were a positronic math calculator and a chest of research microbooks, and he stuck close by them. Instead of making the rounds with the other rocketjocks between flights he stayed aboard the *Helina* in her captive planetary orbit, slaving away at some incomprehensible mathematical hobby that he never discussed.

Max Dunbar, when we went plummeting in port, used to explain carefully to anyone who would listen that it was only his growing up in the point-one gravity of a satellite station that made Bass able to stand the soul-rotting stress of free fall. But when Max was drunk enough he would go a step farther and swear that it was more than a matter of simple adaptation, that Bass' coldness and his sticking aboard ship proved he wasn't human in the same sense that the rest of us were.

And sometimes, as on this emergency antibiotic run, I was inclined to agree with Max. Bass could be pretty hard to take. Not that he was disagreeable or arrogant—it was just that he was too distant and self-sufficient to make friends, and because he was too good a space pilot to leave ordinary jocks like Max and me feeling comfortable.

You wouldn't expect it, but that icy competence of his was even harder on the passengers; instead of reassuring them, his immunity to their discomforts only antagonized our fares and made them resent him. It was that resentment, together with Max Dunbar's crack-up, that brought the trouble aboard the *Helina* to a head.

WE WERE only a couple of hours out of Satellite Station Four, with Max holding the *Helina* to a steady one-G acceleration to maintain the illusion of Earth-normal gravity, when our passengers roused out of their protective *soporif* blackout. I happened to be on fare duty at the time, and I grunted to myself when they sat up eagerly in their padded sleeping-chairs and got the usual look of brash green confidence on their faces.

They'd read as much on spaceflight as Spaceways Limited would release, and they'd heard all the rumors about the "discomforts" of subnormal gravity in flight. But fares are all alike—there's never a one but thinks *he* can take it, that he'll make the run without a whimper.

Their experience with spaceflight to

date had been a three-hour ferry hop from Earth to Station Four at a comfortable one-G acceleration, a jaunt that was over almost before they realized it because it was their first encounter with the spectacular paradox of pitch-black, blazing space. They hadn't sampled the low-weight drive yet, even in docking at Station Four for transferral to the *Helina*; they'd been blacked out first with *soporif* and brought aboard unconscious to spare them the shock of change-over under zero gravity.

They weren't supposed to know what free fall was like. That was only for seasoned rocketjocks like Max Dunbar and me, who had to stay lively and fumble

when the cards fell wrong.

A couple of seats behind him sat a Miss Salas, a swarthy, rawboned spinster of somewhere between forty and sixty. She was down on our fare-list as a school-teacher; she had a commanding horse-face with the beginnings of a mustache and a look of intolerant authority, and she was exactly the type to howl loudest when the pinch came. She had brought along a book titled *Psychological Deviations under Extraterrestrial Environments*, which I took to mean that she was preparing herself against any wild talents she might run afoul of in her new Martian students.

God help those colonial brats, I

The Lonely Places

IT IS no prediction to note that someday stories will be written about space rovers as matter-of-factly as they have long been written about mariners, explorers and prospectors. When space travel actually steps from imagination to reality, however, a fascinating crop of new problems will arise. And many of the most fascinating stories are those which attempt to anticipate these space technicalities which will plague the new pioneers. In realistic fashion, our Mr. Dee introduces you to one here.

—The Editor

our way at the controls through that sickening, plunging insanity. I don't include Bass Mallory here because he wasn't affected. Bass, you see, was immune.

We had only four fares this time, and they looked better or worse than any other human freight I'd ever helped to haul. It wasn't until later that I discovered one of them was a special case, special enough and different enough to touch off the screaming hell that overtook the *Helina* off Mars.

There was a botanist named Grumm, a fat hairy man in his middle fifties with a Heidelberg haircut and pince-nez and a pink round mouth pursed as if he were always about to whistle or spit. He played solitaire on his brief case after the first hour out, blinking weightily between plays and cheating systemati-

thought. *But give her a hand first. She's going to need it.*

Across the aisle from Miss Salas sat a young couple named Ogilvie. George Ogilvie was a blond, pleasant youngster just starting his climb up through the executive ranks of Martian Metals, Incorporated—a good-looking kid in a mild way, but plainly the sort to turn fat and bald long before he reached the niche he'd set his eyes on.

Iris, his wife, was a different sort.

She was small and smooth and a little pale, with soft black hair and great thoughtful dark eyes. It didn't need more than a glance to see that she was *somebody*, that she was alive in a way that most people never even sense, let alone understand. She was a serologist, also with Martian Metals, but her profession didn't matter. Her personality

did—it made the rest of the bunch look like dull standard cutouts, snipped to routine pattern from cardboard stock.

That was the lot of them. Except for its lack of ports they found their fare quarters as comfortable and familiar as the chair-car of any Earthside strato-liner; they made themselves at home in it, as calmly expectant as so many summer vacationists on an excursion trip.

Until our first G-drop, that is.

II

BASS tore himself away from his microbooks and math charts in the crew room long enough to join me for that first acceleration cut. It was part of his duties as captain, intended partly to prepare our passengers for what was coming and partly to stand by me in case they got out of hand.

The group of them sat up eagerly when Bass came in, impressed as much by his air of aloof competence as by the comet-and-crescent emblem of command on the breast of his practical, open-necked uniform. They were bored already by the flight and parched with the first-tripper's thirst for information, and Bass' appearance promised diversion. I could read their reactions, from experience, in their faces: the men tended to envy him his youth and poise and the blond good looks of him; the women fluttered a little, interested and tentatively admiring.

Neither attitude would last long. Neither ever did, but if that bothered Bass Mallory he never mentioned it.

"Your attention!" Bass called.

He didn't say *please*. His attitude toward passengers was this—they were fares, desiring transportation. He was a pilot, and transported them. He gave them what they paid for, but beyond safe passage he owed them no more than he owed the freight stowed in our forward holds.

I never understood until later that Bass was a man apart, whether he wanted to be or not, and that he had no

choice but to play his role. And when it came, of course, it was too late for understanding to help either of us.

"We are about to make our first acceleration cut," Bass said. "Apparent gravity of the ship will be decreased from normal to a constant of point-five."

From there he went into the little talk cooked up by the policy-making offices of Spaceways Limited, giving it to our fares straight down the middle and obviously not caring a damn that the carefully-worded patter did nothing at all to prepare them for what was coming.

"The present drop will bring an apparent decrease in weight, with unpleasant effects which most of you will not have experienced before." He paused there, as always, to let the point sink in and to give the inevitable over-informed fare the opportunity to display his familiarity with spaceflight. "Later there will be two further acceleration cuts—"

I'd have won the bet I made with myself earlier. It was Miss Salas, the schoolteacher, who interrupted.

"To constants of point-twenty-five and point-one," she said crisply. She rolled her brown cow's-eyes at the other fares, gauging their attention as if they were pupils in a schoolroom. "Final apparent gravity will approach one-tenth of that to which we are accustomed. Mrs. Ogilvie, whose weight I should estimate at one hundred pounds, will then weigh only ten."

As smugly as that she summed up the point-one constant and dismissed it with a classroom platitude.

Bass nodded, not bothering to tell her that she had a hell of a lot to learn.

"At midpoint, to preserve a bearable minimum of apparent gravity during the flight without swinging wide of our orbit—"

"The ship will be reversed and flight continued at a deceleration of point-one," Miss Salas finished triumphantly. "During this turnover period—though personally I fail entirely to see the necessity of it—we passengers will be given

aporis again to protect us from the discomforts of free fall."

And that disposed of turnover time. I'd have laughed outright if the thought of that forty-minute intermission in hell hadn't clogged my throat.

"Precisely," Bass said, still unruffled. "Co-pilot Dunbar will begin our first gravity-drop now. The next will take place in twenty hours, the third in forty. Reversal of the ship at midpoint, with corresponding deceleration stages to regain apparent normal gravity and to correct our orbital outswing—"

Max was in worse shape than I'd thought. He cut the *Helina's* propulsors to half acceleration with a ragged jerk, and our first—and easiest—G-drop hit the lot of us like a kick in the stomach.

THERE'S no describing the feel of a G-drop, because the words haven't been coined that will fit it.

Unless you've been through one, the nearest you can come to understanding that is to imagine yourself in an elevator cage with a broken cable overhead and a bottomless shaft below.

You know that first half-second of giddiness when a lift starts down, when there's nothing under your feet and the wild instinctive terror of falling knives up through your groin and makes your stomach turn over and your head spin dizzily. You can control that feeling, because you know it will be only a split-second before gravity takes hold again and reorients you. But a G-drop is different—that first instant doesn't end, and there's no familiar balance to be reached.

All at once there's a hole under you that stabs clear through the universe, and you're falling down it faster and faster. Your stomach leaps up against your diaphragm and smothers you; that inherited apish terror of falling blows through you like a terrible icy wind, and you've got to get your hands on something solid enough to brake that fall.

But there isn't anything solid or stable any more. The ship is a frail plunging shell, streaking through a hollow bottom-

less infinity, and there's no stopping or slowing it.

Our fares panicked, of course. They always do, no matter how carefully the flight medics warn them beforehand.

They came out of their seats like so many jacks-in-boxes, screaming and clutching at each other and bounding around under the sudden half-gravity as if they were on springs. A moment earlier they had been as calm and confident as four Earthside excursionists; now there wasn't a one of them but was deadly sure that the ship had gone haywire and was falling out of control.

Bass and I stood fast and watched them, and it was then that I began to realize the sort of special case that Iris Ogilvie was going to be.

The G-drop hit her as hard as any of the others, but she had more control than the rest of them lumped together. She saw Bass and me standing by, and she understood instantly that what she felt was only a part of the "unpleasant effects" they had been promised.

She caught her husband's arm and, small as she was, stowed him back into his seat. I couldn't hear what she said above the uproar, but it must have been something pretty sharp because George flushed sheepishly and sat tight.

Grumm and Miss Salas needed a little longer to follow suit. The lot of them shook and jittered and clung to their seats in an effort to satisfy their instinctive craving for support, but when Bass spoke to them this time they listened.

Just then Bass, calm and distant and utterly unaffected, seemed a superman or a demigod; they waited with a sort of desperate eagerness for the reassurance they expected from him.

They didn't get it. Bass had more important things to think of than wasting time coddling fares; it was still his shift off duty in crew quarters, and he was in a hurry to get back to his microbooks.

"We are now under one-half normal apparent gravity," he said. "Our next acceleration cut will occur in twenty hours."

Then he walked out and left our fares staring palely at one another and wondering what sort of madness they had let themselves in for.

I'D HAVE been glad to walk out, too, but I couldn't leave our fares to themselves. There's something cumulative and contagious about group fear; the weaker passengers are likely to go hysterical or violent, or even suicidal. There's an airlock exit, for instance, at the bottom of the control-room companionway between fare and crew quarters, that attracts the unstable ones like flies to honey. That lock is operated by a control-panel switching relay for safety, so that no one but the pilot on duty can open it.

So, being stuck with fare duty, there was nothing I could do but sit tight and try to give our passengers the reassurance that Bass had refused.

"You'll get used to it," I told them, "before the twenty hours are gone."

"But then there'll be *another* drop!" Miss Salas protested. She was realizing for the first time something of what lay ahead of her, and the understanding sent her so pale that her mustache stood out blackly against her pallor. "And another after *that!* If they grow worse in proportion—"

"They will," I said. It sounded heartless, but there was no point in trying to soften the truth now. "Living for a couple of days under final point-one gravity is hell, but it's nothing you won't be able to take. If it were, the Spaceways medics wouldn't have okayed you for the trip."

That gave them, as the books say, to think.

Typically, it was Iris Ogilvie who put the first finger on the basic failing of spaceflight.

"Surely there must be a better way of simulating gravity than this," she said. "We've had space travel for thirty years. Couldn't they, in that time—"

"There are only two alternatives," I told her. "Spaceways tried both, and

neither worked. The centrifugal system divides the ship into two sections, rotating living quarters about the engine section—it's too cumbersome, almost impossible to navigate under, and the Coriolis effect fouls up engine operation. The only other answer is artificial gravity, but Spaceways gave that up as a bad job when they found that a working unit smaller than an office building couldn't be built."

Maybe I should have let it go at that, but the present Spaceways experiment rubbed me wrong.

"Lately they've decided to give up passenger comfort in order to develop more efficient crews," I said. "They're building a nursery satellite off Luna and adopting homeless babies to fill it. They're going to train free-fall pilots like Bass Mallory by the hundreds."

It didn't mean anything to them then, because they didn't really know Bass yet.

Grumm's reaction took a different line, puzzling me until I understood that he was only following the sort of analytical logic you find in scientific people. The two G-drops still to come had set him to estimating how much worse he might feel, and he was wondering if he could stand up under the punishment. Specifically, he wanted to know if we ever gave *soporif* before the ship reached turnover time.

"Not ever," I said firmly. "And for a good reason. *Soporif* in small quantities relaxes the nervous system without risk, but too much of it damages the brain—permanently. That's why we hold it off so long, working the ship down through three stages of acceleration and up again through three decelerations, to keep the dosage down."

He tried to laugh it off, but the best he could manage was a sickly pink grimace. "I suppose I shall have to endure it, then."

"You sure as hell will," I told him, and let it go at that.

I saw Iris Ogilvie watching me then past Grumm's shambling bulk, and the look on her face made me jump.

She wasn't afraid any more—she was hopping mad. She had sunk those fine little white teeth of hers into her soft red underlip, and her big dark eyes were blazing—I'd never believed until then that eyes *could* blaze—with anger.

Ordinarily I'd have shrugged it off. A crewman gets pretty thick-skinned after a time, and a fare's resentment is only another unimportant detail of the flight. But I was raw in the sensibilities after making four runs in a row, and for some reason I couldn't bear being despised by a woman like Iris Ogilvie. So I went back and explained to her how it was.

"I'm sorry for Grumm," I said. "I'm sorry for the lot of you, but what can I do? The medics checked you down to your toenail cuticle and explained what was ahead—it's not my fault that their patter didn't register. It's nobody's fault that you can't imagine what subnormal gravity is like until you've lived through it. It's like having a baby—it's got to happen to you before you'll believe it."

SHE scorched me with her eyes, still hating me. George stirred in his seat as if he'd like to resent what I was saying, but the simple effort of turning his head left him too green and queasy to do more than hang onto his lunch and his seat.

"This is how it is with us," I went on, ignoring George. "We don't like low-gravity flight any better than you do, the difference is that we know what comes next because we've been through it before. We face the same dumb routine every trip—to begin with, characters like your Miss Salas tell us our business, but by the time we reach point-one they're throwing up in the aisle and begging to die. We're not supermen, and we're no longer on patience than anybody else. Our fares are going to hate us anyway before we orbit around Mars, so why should we knock ourselves out apologizing for something we can't help?"

She quit hating me and looked thoughtful. I hadn't covered the half of

it, and she had sense enough to know it.

"I hadn't considered it in that light," she admitted. "It must be a trying profession, really."

Trying, she said.

She took the thought far enough ahead, as Grumm had done, to guess at something of what she would feel when we settled to our final point-one constant. But unlike Grumm she went a step farther and tried to imagine what it must be like to spin the ship at turnover time, without benefit of *soporif* and under no gravity at all.

When she asked me what turnover time was like, I answered her question with another. "Could you write home from Mars and tell your friends what a G-drop feels like?"

She gave me a wry little smile.

"I'll try to remember that next time I find myself hating your indifference. But I'm not so sure," she added, losing the smile, "that my tolerance will include your captain. He—I don't believe he's even interested in us, let alone sympathetic!"

I let that pass, hoping she would satisfy herself with disliking Bass Mallory instead of being swept to the other extreme as so many other pretty and impressionable women had done. There's not a lot of difference between hating and loving, and when you push one feeling too far it can turn into the other—especially when the object is a cool blond superman like Bass. Ordinarily it wouldn't have mattered two centicredits, of course, but somehow it was different where Iris Ogilvie was concerned. I didn't want that happening to her.

"You don't leap to defend him," Iris said. I could see the interest stirring in her eyes. "He really doesn't care, does he?"

"Nobody knows," I had to admit. "Bass is a mystery even to his crew, Mrs. Ogilvie. He never makes the free-period rounds with us—he never even makes planetfall between runs. He was born and trained in space, and he likes it better up here where he can be alone

with his hobby . . . you can't judge a man like Bass by the same rules the rest of us go by. They don't apply."

She looked skeptical, and I added what should have been the clincher. "Bass is what they call an anomaly. Nothing ever bothers him, including free fall and women."

But he won't be an anomaly, I thought, when Spaceways graduates its first class of free-fall babies. They'll be just like Bass, and they won't give a damn, either.

III

BASS relieved me when my six-hour tour of fare duty was up, and I took over the controls from Max Dunbar.

Max was edgier than I'd ever seen him. He hung around, bobbing nervously under the half-normal gravity and smoking cigarettes chain-fashion, while I checked the fuel gauges and gyros and meteor alarms and the little amber caution light that warned the pilot when the airlock exit was unsealed.

It must have taken him ten minutes to get around to the thing that worried him, but when he did it made me jump.

"I shouldn't have signed on for this run, Vic," he said. "I should have demanded my Earthside rest period and got stinking drunk. . . ."

He let it taper off there because there wasn't any need of finishing it. The private demon of all professional rocket-jocks was riding Max—he was afraid he wouldn't last the flight out, that he'd crack at turnover time and Bass and I would shoot him full of *soporif* and report him to Spaceways at the end of the run. Twenty-four is a hell of a time of life for a good man to be washed out and retired.

"Easy does it, jock," I said, trying to kid him out of it. "When we orbit around Mars we'll make up for lost time. We'll take a lighter down and tour the local python pits, and when we check in for the return flight you'll be as good as new."

His face twisted.

"And Superman Mallory will be waiting patiently for us," he said. "He'll have added another page or two to that hobbyhorse microbook he's been writing for the past five years, and he'll be cold and calm and superior about the way we waste our time. But he'll be steadier than the two of us together, all set to put on his iron-man act for the next bunch of stupid fares. . . ."

There was something in his voice this time that turned me cold to the roots of my hair. I'd heard it in the voices of other men who had cracked up in free fall, but those men hadn't been as close to me as Max was.

Being honest, that wasn't the worst of it—if this happened to Max, it could happen to me.

I tried to be logical with him. "But you and I can't expect to compete with Bass at his own game, Max—we learned it the hard way, while Bass was born to it. He *likes* it. It's not our fault, or his, that he can take free fall without turning a hair. It's just the way things are, and we've got to accept them."

"You got it wrong," Max said in the same voice. "It's not his ability that gravels me, Vic. It's himself. Him and his microbooks and slide-rules and his filing-case mind and the cold-hearted smugness of him. He's not right or normal or human."

His face twisted tighter. "I hate his goddamned freakish guts."

It was warning enough; I should have reported him to Bass Mallory right then. It's a pattern they follow when they start sliding off the deep end—they can't see clearly enough to place the blame where it belongs, so they pick someone stronger and surer who has what they lack. They start brooding and hating, and the longer they brood the worse they hate.

But I couldn't do it. This wasn't just another anonymous rocketjock on a Spaceways roster; it was Max Dunbar, who had gone drinking and pit-plumbing with me between runs. I couldn't

write him off, so I took the only chance left.

"Get down to sleeping quarters," I said. "Take a sedative and hit the hammock. You'll feel better when you come around again."

He didn't seem to hear me. He stood there a few minutes longer with that sick, glassy look in his eyes, and then he walked away and went down the companionway toward the crew quarters. I checked the little amber warning light on the control panel to make sure he hadn't thrown the airlock switch off safety, then I sat back and broke out in a cold, slow sweat.

I sat there for the rest of my control shift and thought about Max, lying in his hammock and staring up at the gray bulkheads and muttering to himself. Some little quirk of association brought to mind the new satellite station that Spaceways was building off Luna, and the possibilities behind the project left me more unsettled than ever.

Maybe Spaceways is right, and ordinary jocks like Max and me aren't meant for space, I thought. Maybe that privilege was meant from the beginning for men like Bass Mallory and for those other free-fall specialists to follow him. It's their element, not ours.

It was a relief when Bass, calm and distant and wonderfully sure of himself, spelled me at the controls. I went down to my hammock and took the advice I'd given Max—I swallowed a mild sedative and dozed off until it was time, six hours later, for my shift again at nursemaid-ing our fares.

WHEN I got back on duty, they were tightening up already for the next G-drop, but were in better shape than I'd expected. All of them but Grumm, the botanist, had adjusted pretty well to the half-G acceleration and had decided they'd live through it.

The second cut came two hours after I went on duty. It was worse than the first one, of course, but again I was lucky. Nobody shot his lunch, that is,

and only Grumm passed out on me.

I stood by until the drop was over, reassuring my fares according to Spaceways policy by my stalwart indifference. It isn't easy even for a crewman to stand fast when his insides move and crawl inside him, adjusting to the lesser weight and changing pressures, and that eternal terror of falling knives up through his groin. But training tells. I could take it.

Later I went down the aisle, shuffling like a man on skis to keep from bobbing kangaroo-fashion under the point-twenty-five pull, and talked to my fares. They were all green about the mouth this time, but Grumm was harder hit than the others and George Ogilvie wasn't much better.

Funny thing, you'd expect the women to be sicker than the men, but they never are. There's something in the female makeup—maybe it's tied in with their constitutional resistance to the physical and psychological stresses of childbirth—that makes them better able to stand prolonged strain than men.

I was really sorry for Grumm. After I brought him out of his faint he crouched in his seat like a fat, hairy toad, shivering and blinking and blubbering shamelessly, too far gone in his misery to care what anyone thought. The quarter-G pull had already made noticeable adjustments in his bulk; his jowls and paunch had quit sagging and stood out roundly, and his clothes didn't fit him properly any more.

George Ogilvie was nearly as sick, but he made a better try at hiding it. He didn't blubber like Grumm, but sat slumped beside Iris, staring fixedly ahead and holding tight to his seat against the panicky certainty that he was falling straight out of the cosmos. He hadn't been married long, and I guessed that he was trying his damndest to put on a good front before his wife.

Miss Salas recovered enough of her old spirit to complain bitterly about the perfidy of Spaceways in deceiving her

about the real nature of space flight, and to sniff in faint triumph at Grumm and George Ogilvie because they were harder hit than she.

Iris Ogilvie took the ordeal better than any of them. Before the end of my shift she even felt well enough to carry on a near normal conversation, and what she had on her mind pointed up the worry that had been gnawing me.

She was concerned about Max Dunbar's edginess, though luckily she didn't know enough yet about free-fall strain to guess how close to the cracking-point Max really was.

And in spite of herself she was even more impressed by Bass Mallory and his immunity.

"A strange man," she said once. "He doesn't seem to have *any* of our ordinary failings . . . or sympathies. He sits through his shifts with us, reading microbooks and writing in his notebook and paying us no attention at all unless we demand it. Is he really immune to free fall, as Mr. Dunbar says?"

I could guess the sort of stuff Max had been giving her, so I made my answer as fair as I could.

"It isn't fair to compare Bass to the rest of us," I told her. "Unless you're going to carry the comparison all the way, and you can't do that because Bass never associates with anyone closely enough to show what he thinks. He stays aboard the *Helina*, where he feels at home, and spends his free time at whatever it is he's working on. Did I tell you that he was born on old Satellite Station One? His mother died there, and Bass was brought up by rotating shifts of Spaceways personnel, without personal ties of any kind. No, free fall doesn't bother him. He's in his element up here, while the rest of us are like fish out of water."

She raised her brows a little, but didn't interrupt while I went on unloading my mind.

"Bass doesn't react like the rest of us," I said, "because his psychology is differ-

ent and because his values aren't the same as ours. He's spent his life in space—can you wonder that he's different?"

I COULD have said more. A lot more. I could have told her the things I thought sometimes during hammock shifts, when I wondered along with Max Dunbar and a thousand others if Bass Mallory was really human like the rest of us or if being raised in space might have made him something more or less than the parent stock he sprang from.

Maybe, I thought sometimes, Bass was the first of a new race, the forerunner of a fresh branch of Mankind rising to meet the demands of a new age. Maybe the parentless babies that Spaceways was collecting to follow in his steps would mark the first real division of humanity into two separate species, one still bound to the planets while the other went roving free into space. I even wondered what the scientists might call the new species, but my education wasn't extensive enough to furnish the right term. *Homo spaciens*, maybe—I wouldn't know.

But I did know that nothing but trouble could come of a woman like Iris Ogilvie interesting herself in a man like Bass Mallory. The two of them were as far apart as the stars, even if Iris were not already married. Throwing them together would be—I sneered at the corny poetic ring of what I was thinking, but I couldn't put it any other way—like mating fire and ice. . . .

It's strange how fast time passes when you've been under a crushing strain for so long that you've given up anticipating the end of it. There's a sort of defense mechanism in the human mind that makes allowances for that feeling; it conditions you somehow to living only in the present moment, and it suppresses your swing toward surrender just short of the snapping point.

Somehow none of us cracked up even at the third G-drop, when we slipped into our long-haul constant of point-one acceleration. Not even Max, though he

came chillingly close.

I think the thing that kept him going for so long was Iris Ogilvie's presence aboard ship. Her natural warmth and understanding made her everything that Bass Mallory wasn't, and Max turned instinctively to her as a support against Bass and his superiority.

Iris told me about their conversations when I followed Max on fare shift. The two of them talked through most of his tours, ignoring George, who was too sick now to listen, let alone resent their chumminess. Iris was too level-headed to take Max seriously, but I could see that the longer she listened to his railings against Bass the more interested she became.

I warned Max to lay off, but he only gave me a glassy half-aware look and went away muttering to himself. I didn't mention the matter to Bass; I figured that he probably knew about it already, and didn't give a tinker's damn.

Things went like that right up to turnover time and the blow-up. We reached reversal point, put our fares under *soporif* and left them sleeping limply while the three of us went up to the control room to swing the ship.

Everybody knows how a spaceship is reversed for deceleration, swinging on a reaction pivot supplied by an assembly of three flywheels spinning at right angles to each other. The principle is as old as Archimedes, but the application is something else again. It needs close to an hour, during which time the propulsors must be shut off and the ship thrown into free fall.

Turnover time was our crisis, and it solved once and for all the problem of how long Max could hold on. The instant we went into free fall, he cracked wide open.

IV

FREE fall is so much worse than the regular G-drops that there's no point in straining for a comparison. The little sense of orientation you have left at

point-one constant is gone; you don't know if you're on your feet on your head or your back, you're dizzy and half blind and there's a roaring in your ears like the sound of a hundred Niagaras. Your head spins and your stomach heaves and you're sicker than a drunk sweating out a lifetime of accumulated hangovers.

Side effects make it worse. The human circulatory system is geared to function against a one-G pull, so that there is ordinarily a lot more pressure against the lower extremities than against the upper ones. Free fall equalizes that pressure, congesting the brain, and your heart turns into a hydraulic pump that kicks the load up and up.

And over everything else is that sudden awful realization of the infinite empty light-years of space stretching away under you, and a howling instinctive certainty that you're falling clear out of the universe.

Max went mad.

He threshed convulsively around the control room, twisting and screaming and caroming off the bulkheads, smashing everything he touched in his frantic effort to lay hands on something that would stop his fall. Bass and I, working like fiends to set the reversal gyros, had to let him rave until we had the ship in position and our new point-one deceleration constant set up.

Then we tackled Max and lugged him screaming to crew quarters and strapped him into his hammock. Bass gave him a heavy shot of *soporif* to quiet his epileptic strugglings, and we got a close look for the first time at what exertion and terror had done to him.

He was drenched to the scalp with perspiration. Lather clung to the corners of his mouth like dried flecks of shaving soap, and his soaring blood pressure had mottled his skin and ruptured the tiny veins of his eyes. He wasn't the old careless jock I'd known any more; he looked more like a bloated, livid caricature of the Max he had been.

Bass and I stared at each other across his still figure, and each reacted accord-

ing to his nature and training.

"Washed out," Bass said. "We'll have to break in a new third pilot on our next trip out."

I looked again at poor Max, lying there with oily globules of sweat rolling off his face and little beads of blood and tears trembling on his eyelashes, and I cursed Bass Mallory and Spaceways Limited with every word of spaceport filth I could lay tongue to.

Then I went into the john and threw up.

THE flight went on like a dull nightmare.

We roused our fares out of their *soporif* stupor. We mopped the aisles when Grumm got sick, and lied wearily to Iris and Miss Salas, the only two who had strength enough left to be curious, when they asked about Max.

Max was at the controls, we told them, or he was off duty. I had a strong conviction that Iris wasn't fooled, but it didn't matter until she made it her business.

Max had snapped out of his convulsions, but the change wasn't encouraging. He lay in his hammock hour after hour, sweating and trembling and muttering disjointedly to himself. We did what we could for him, but we didn't dare take his straps off for fear he might break loose and go storming into fare quarters, where the sight of him would have upset our passengers more than any G-drop.

The poor devil was in the foulest sort of shape. His eyes had kept their blood-shot shine; his hair was matted and snarled, and he was so filthy that he stank. But we couldn't release him for a proper cleanup—it took both of us, risking the ship on automatic and letting our fares shift for themselves, to get him to the john and back.

It was hell.

Our fares didn't make it easier. Grumm went on retching and whining. George Ogilvie sat like a dead man, eyes closed and both hands gripping his seat-

rail until his knuckles cracked. Miss Salas carped and stormed by turns, threatening to write an exposé that would put Spaceways Limited on the bankrupt lists.

"Others have tried it," I told her once. "But it never works—all the words invented can't describe this to the public. There's no answer to it short of artificial gravity, and they've given up on that."

Iris Ogilvie's composure did a lot to stiffen my own spine, but at the same time it left me as much ashamed as encouraged. It was hard to see a little wisp like her take her punishment so quietly, when it wouldn't have needed more than another ounce or two of pressure to put me in a hammock beside Max Dunbar.

And the way Bass Mallory handled himself made it worse.

He went about his double duties as calmly as a Sunday stroller in a park, as icily composed as ever and speaking only when it was demanded of him.

We hated him for that, all of us but Iris Ogilvie. I could see her interest in him growing; I could see her fighting against it with that wonderful common sense of hers, but I knew there was only one way it could end.

She and George hadn't exchanged ten words in as many hours. George was really sick now, half unconscious and wishing he were dead, and Iris had found that it only aggravated his condition when she tried to cheer him up. So she left him alone.

The contrast between George and Bass had its effect. Iris began inventing excuses to talk to Bass; during his fare shifts she would call him out of his microbooks and his mathematical sketchings and ask questions about the ship, about the satellite stations, about anything that Bass would discuss.

And after every session she seemed a little more thoughtful and determined. Because Bass wouldn't talk about himself; she learned no more of what he really thought or felt, liked or despised, than any of us ever had.

The flight went on, and on.

BUT not even a space run can last forever. Sixty hours off Mars we threw the *Helina* out of her long-haul minimum deceleration and went into a more comfortable apparent gravity of point-twenty-five. Two more buildings through constants of point-five and normal, and we'd have it made.

Sixty hours more and we would orbit around Mars. A lighter would come out from Martian Satellite Station Three and ferry down our passengers and our cargo of antibiotics, and the flight would be wrapped up and written off. Max would go to a rehabilitation hospital, I would make a flying tour of the Martian hotspots to ease the accumulated strain of the run, and Bass Mallory would sit alone with his microbooks and his slide rules aboard the *Helina*.

Our fares, on sane footing again after planetfall, would go on to their jobs and forget us. All but Iris Ogilvie, who wasn't the kind to forget.

Always, even after she had given George a kid or two and had settled into the pioneer culture of Mars, she would have a picture of that flight in the back of her mind, an indelible memory of the lot of us cringing like children from the bright, plunging emptiness of space. And she'd have a bigger picture of Bass Mallory striding, utterly composed and unconcerned, over and through us.

Like a man striding through sheep, or a superman through men.

Just then I think I hated Bass worse than Max ever had. Not for anything Bass had done, but for what he was and for what he made the rest of us by being what he was.

That kind of resentment strings you overtight, charges you full of the need to strike back or to escape your conviction of inferiority by cracking up like Max Dunbar. I must have slipped further than I'd thought, or I wouldn't have tried to soothe my wounded ego by defying Bass' direct order to keep Max isolated.

Iris Ogilvie guessed what had happened to Max and begged me to let her

into crew quarters to nurse him. I let her go. I knew I should have refused, but my damned-up resentment—coupled with the thought of poor Max lying mindless and filthy and uncomfortable in his hammock—tipped the scales.

Somehow, though, that little act of defiance helped. I set myself to wrestle with the grinding strain of the flight, and I began to think finally that I would last the trip out.

I lasted through the eternal twenty hours it took us to reach a point-five deceleration. I hung on through another lifetime that saw us back at full apparent-normal gravity, with Mars swelling rapidly in our control-room port and our fares on their feet again and taking an interest in life.

That was when the blow-up came, when we expected it least.

I was on my way to relieve Bass at the controls when it happened. I went out of fare quarters past the airlock exit and the john in the corridor, glanced up the companionway to make sure that Bass was still on shift, and then looked into crew quarters to warn Iris that it was time to break up her Samaritan act.

The first thing I saw was Max's empty hammock.

Max was gone, of course. It was plain that Iris had tried to stop him; she lay in a small crumpled heap on the crew-room decking, eyes closed and her soft dark hair half covering the big blue bruise on one cheek. At first sight I was certain she was dead, but when I knelt and put my ear to her breast I heard her heart beating strongly.

I should have known it would happen—Iris had loosed Max's hands, probably to slip off his tunic while she sponged him down, and he had ripped off his straps and broken free. Max was somewhere aboard the *Helina* at that moment, and he would have forgotten everything except the obsession that had thrown him off balance in the beginning.

He was after Bass, and Bass was at

the controls—

The shock of explosion threw me headlong across Iris Ogilvie's still body.

V

THE *Helina* rocked and heeled, shuddering from end to end. The detonation deafened me with its slamming roar of exploding fuel tanks and plangent steely clangor of bulkheads ripping free.

I got my feet under me and jumped up—and I didn't come down.

The propulsors cut out suddenly and left me hanging in free fall, lost in the plunging panic of utter disorientation. The crew room whirled around me without angle or perspective; Iris, floating inches off the metal decking, seemed first overhead and then below, close enough to touch and at the same time a hundred miles away.

All that saved me from cracking then and there was the screaming of our passengers, a raw animal sound that shocked me out of my funk and reminded me that I was a crewman.

A hammock stanchion banged me across the face, and I caught it to hold myself still. There wasn't any up or down, no sense of equilibrium or orientation; the conviction of falling was like an icy wind roaring through my skull, and I was sick.

God, I was sick.

But I couldn't let it throw me—I had to help Bass, in the control room. In a way it was a tribute to Bass and his invincibility, but it never occurred to me that Max might have put him out of the way with the same blast that wrecked the *Helina's* reserve fuel tanks. All I could think of then was that the passengers might flounder out of their quarters and up the companionway, and that Bass would have to have help. . . .

I had to force myself to remember how the crew room looked under normal gravity before I could make sense out of its crazy dislocated lines and angles. I got out of the place finally, swimming like a blind fish in a crooked maze, and

pushed myself up to the control room.

It was empty.

I hooked my feet under the pilot's chair and forced my blurring eyes to identify the control gauges. Their readings brought a quick touch of relief—Bass had cut the fuel flow in time. Our propulsors were off, but at least we wouldn't ignite and blow.

I swam back down the companionway to fare quarters, bumping impartially against the walls and floors and ceilings, and found Bass in command of the situation.

Grumm the botanist hung in the air like a great flaccid frog, utterly relaxed in the catatonic limpness of *soporif* stupor. Bass was just drawing the hypo needle out of Miss Salas' arm; she was still threshing slowly like a grotesque animated toy in the process of running down, her eyes rolled up and all awareness draining out of her swarthy face.

Bass gave me a look that said nothing at all.

"Get Ogilvie out of crew quarters," he ordered. "His wife, too, if she's still alive. I'll be along with the needle."

I kicked my way back to crew quarters just in time to meet George Ogilvie floundering out. He had found his wife—God knows how he managed it in the shape he was in, with his eyes full of blood and tears and his plumpish body heaving with a continual spasmodic retching—and was towing her along under his arm.

Iris roused just as the three of us bumped together. I had barely time to see the terror of understanding start in her eyes before Bass Mallory came lancing with shark-like certainty down the corridor and stuck the two of them with his hypo.

"Dunbar is in the pumphoom," Bass said then. "We'll have to work fast—he may blow another tank."

BASS reached the pumphoom first, of course. He was wrestling with Max and trying to clear his *soporif* needle when I worked my way to them. I tried

to help, blinking desperately to keep my eyes in focus and going roaring blind every time my head turned too sharply and upset the momentary balance of fluid in my auricular canals.

I managed to hold Max still long enough for Bass to shoot him full of *soporif*, but at a price. Somehow in his convulsions Max caught my left arm with just the proper sort of freakish leverage needed to snap it at the elbow.

The pain of the break was the last straw. All the nausea and terror and exhaustion I ever felt seemed to roll up in a thick black cloud and smother me. I went into that blackness eagerly, snuggling under it like a freezing man under a blanket. . . .

And came to again, hours later, in my hammock. The *Helina* was decelerating at full apparent gravity, and the dim whine of gyros told me that Bass was already warping us into orbit around Mars.

That meant, of course, that Bass had been equal to the emergency. With his usual cool competence he had sealed off the damaged fuel tanks and had put the ship into operation again; while the rest of us dangled as limp as so many hamsters in hibernation, Bass had gathered up the loose ends and was bringing us in.

He had even splinted my broken arm as neatly as a Spaceways medic could have. I lay there nursing it and gritting my teeth, knowing that I should have been grateful but feeling all appreciation crowded out by a shame that seared like acid.

Superman, I thought. Damn him, does he have to win always?

Max was strapped into the hammock beside me. He must have come out of his *soporif* trance long before, but shock and exhaustion and the wonderful security of normal gravity had combined to put him under again. He was sleeping like a baby.

I didn't have long to envy him or to feel sorry for myself. Iris Ogilvie came in and stood over my hammock, and I

saw that she had been crying.

"Thank God you're awake at last," she said. "Come with me—quickly!"

We went up to the control room together. The nausea and terror of falling had left me, and the feel of solid decking underfoot was sheer Heaven. That security faded when I saw Grumm and Miss Salas and George Ogilvie huddled together in a corner, watching Bass at the controls with pale, frightened eyes.

"You'll have to take over, Vic," Iris said. She gripped my good arm so tightly that it hurt. "Bass can't hold out much longer. He shouldn't have done it—he should have saved an ampule of *soporif* for himself, instead of spending it all on us. If we'd only known—"

"Known what?" I demanded. Nobody answered me.

I went over beside Bass and glanced at the control readings, and breathed easier when I saw that no serious damage had been done to the ship except for the loss of our reserve fuel. Then I looked out the forward port and understood a part of what I should have guessed before.

The burnt-umber globe of Mars was growing steadily ahead, and it was already larger than it should have been.

After that, the score was easy enough to read; without our reserve fuel supply Bass hadn't been able to establish a stable satellite orbit. We'd have to make an actual planetfall, depending on atmospheric friction to brake our landing speed.

Bass looked up at me without moving his hands from the firing keys. His face was ashy and there was a faint shine of perspiration on his forehead, but it was his eyes that turned me cold. They had a sort of glassy fixity that reminded me of Max's, and in them I read the stark breathless horror of a man looking straight into his own private hell.

"You'll be interested in my Achilles' heel, Vic," he said. His mouth twisted, and for the first time I understood that he had known all along how Max and I felt about him. "Stick around. You're

about to see it exposed."

I was staring at him dumbly when Iris Ogilvie shook my arm. "You've got to do something, Vic! Can you work the controls with only one hand?"

I looked at the meter readings again. "Sure, it's a simple enough planetfall spiral. But *why?*"

BASS laughed. I hope I never hear that sort of laugh again.

"Because the shoe is on the other foot, and the foot is clay," he said. He looked at the growing Mars-disk in the port, and a sort of spastic shiver shook him so hard his teeth rattled. "Because I never made a planetfall in my life, remember? And I can't make one now."

I understood, then.

I added up all the free-fall hells I'd ever endured, remembering the patient years of conditioning I'd sweated out before I could bear the agoraphobia of empty space and learn to live with my primal fear of falling, and I tried to imagine what it would be like to face all that for the first time without any preparation at all.

Not that agoraphobia was Bass Mallory's private demon. It was just the opposite, because space was his natural element and all his values were reversed.

"*Claustrophobia.*" I said, wondering why I'd never guessed it before. "Bass, I didn't know. . . ."

He looked up jerkily, his face frozen with strain.

"I wanted to see Earth, Vic, but it wasn't for me. This is why I never made planetfall with you and Max, why I stayed aboard ship and worked to prevent the same thing from happening to others after me."

He grinned crookedly, showing clenched teeth. "I never kept to myself because I despised the rest of you, but because I envied you. I've lived in terror of this moment all my life."

I looked out with him at the swelling globe of Mars, and for just a moment I could feel what he felt. To him that

looming bulk ahead was worse than the shining blackness of space had been to me, worse than the awful plunging terror of free fall.

Dropping down between its uprearing horizons was like being pulled down to be buried and suffocated. A claustrophobe lost in a cave has the frenzied feeling that its walls are squeezing in on him, that its roof is crushing him down—

Bass Mallory had a world on his back. There's no describing that feeling, but for just an instant I understood what Bass was going through. It was like having the whole cosmos tower up and fold itself over you, greedy and inexorable, to bury you alive forever.

I put a hand on his shoulder, and winced at the tremor I felt under my fingers.

"Don't give in to it, jock," I begged. "You can beat it. You're still a better man than any of us, or you wouldn't have given away that last hypo of *soporif.*"

He thanked me with his eyes for the "jock."

"No, I wanted it this way," he said. "It would have had to come some day, and I'm well out of it."

He stood up, keeping his back to the port. "I'm going below."

When Iris Ogilvie started toward him he stopped her sharply. "Keep back. I didn't stand over you when you were tied in knots with the G-drops—the least you can do is to give me the same privilege."

At the companionway he paused to look back.

"One favor, Vic—will you see that my notebooks are turned over to Government? They'll put the specialists on the right track, and they'll break up the satellite nursery project that Spaceways is building to train more free-fall pilots. They'll *have* to stop it—men aren't meant for that."

He went down the companionway. The rest of us stared dumbly at one another for a moment, and then I looked

at the control panel and saw what I had missed before.

Once there had been an amber bulb up at the left corner of the board, a little caution light that blinked on and off to warn the pilot when the airlock exit was unsealed. Someone had crushed the glass and let the exposed filament burn in two—I could see the dead ends of the wire clearly, fused to tiny silvery globules of melted metal.

"Stop him!" I yelled, and snatched at the little toggle switch under the bulb. "For God's sake, don't let him—"

My hand skidded off the empty surface. Bass, sitting there while the rest of us snored under our *soporif*, had unscrewed the base-plate and removed the relay that sealed the lock.

Down in the corridor the airlock whooshed with a sound like a giant's sighing. The outer port clanged dully, slamming open against the hull.

None of us spoke or went down to look. There wasn't any use.

ing up their new experimental satellite station off Luna. When it's done, the free-fall problem will be a thing of the past; there won't be any more G-drops or *soporif* at turnover time, and men will outgrow the solar system and turn their eyes outward toward the stars.

Here is what they're doing out there with your tax money, and why.

They dropped their original pilot-nursery program and took up the Malloy Equations instead. Out of the Malloy Equations—which Bass had worked out while Max Dunbar and I were out pit-plumbing with the other rocket-jocks between flights—they've developed an effect that ends the problems of spaceflight. There was a way after all to build a practical artificial gravity unit smaller than an office building, and Bass found it.

That effect also solves another problem that bothered me—and Bass, too, for a widely different reason—settling once and for all the question of a dividing humanity and the rising of a new race of space-going supermen.

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Illustration by
PAUL ORBAN

THE GUIDES

By TOM McMORROW, JR.

This time the cops took the crook for a ride . . .

OF COURSE you know how the Guides operate. They came for all of you at one time or another, or you wouldn't be here. But this is a case out of the ordinary, the only one of its sort in our files. Sit quietly and sniff your flowers, and I will tell it to you.

The subject of the case is known among Them—or was—as James (Fish-eye) Fazoni. Mr. Fazoni was a prominent man, the envy and admiration of many a dope peddler, extortionist and politician.

One warm spring night in 1954, Mr.

Fazoni found himself lying by the side of a country road. He opened his eyes slowly, full of wonderment. Whatever could he be doing here? Then he noticed the man sitting beside him under the stars. The man wore a derby hat and he looked much like Detective Lieutenant Michael McCawley.

"Well," said the man, "Are you ready to go now?" That was the voice. Fish-eye had heard it often enough in his nightmares.

"McCawley!" he grunted, sitting up, "What are you doin' here? Matter of fact, what am I doin' here?"

The man smiled crookedly—still like McCawley. "I'm not McCawley," he said. "I'm your Guide."

"Whatcha givin' me, McCawley? Is this a —"

"Quiet!" said the man sharply. "Just listen. I've been through this many times before and you haven't. It's best if you just let me tell it right through without interjecting any of your foolish human protests."

"Human!"

"You heard me. I apply the term to you because it has nothing to do with me. Although I appear to you as one, I am not a man. I'm one of the Garden Guides. We guide you to the gardens beyond when your life on this earth is done."

"You mean I'm—"

"Yes, yes, dead—now don't interrupt. You see, I take a different shape for every man. To you, I appear as this detective whom you fear. To another, I might be an old school-teacher, or a stern parent. To still others, who don't fear me, I may be an old friend, or possibly a St. Bernard dog. . . ."

"What kind of a crazy gag is this, McCawley?" shouted Fish-eye, jumping to his feet. "St. Bernard dogs—" Then he spotted the smoking wreck on the other side of the road and the indignant shout was snapped off in his throat.

"That's right, it's your car," said the Guide smoothly, "Your body's in it. As I was saying, some see me as a St.

Bernard dog. Would you be convinced if I took that shape?"

"No, no, don't do that," Fish-eye muttered, thoroughly shaken now, "Lemme figure this out."

"Don't strain your limited facilities," said the Guide. "Just come down the road a bit with me. I believe there's a filling station around the bend. It just takes one encounter with the living to convince them."

The filling station experience was a bad one for Fazoni. He spoke to the attendant, an elderly man of alert expression. But he wasn't alert where Fazoni was concerned. He didn't seem to hear him or even to see him.

Fish-eye raised his voice and yelled. Then he screamed. But the attendant just looked right through him and yawned gapingly.

Then a truck drove up. Fish-eye tried the driver—after all, the attendant might be off his nut or something. But the driver just swapped the usual weather comments with the attendant while the truck was gassed up. Fazoni danced and yelped in vain.

"Why, them crazy crumbs!" he complained finally, "They don't take no more notice of me than if I was—uh—"

"Dead, Fazoni?"

"Oh . . . yeah . . . I see what you mean. . . . Okay, Buddy, you win. I'm dead."

"Well," said the Guide, "I'm glad that's over. It's always an ordeal. Now come with me." And he clambered over the tail gate of the truck.

"Where are we goin'?" Fazoni wheezed as he hauled himself up, "To them Gardens you was talkin' about?"

"Not yet. First we must reckon up your worldly deeds and misdeeds. So we're returning to the scenes of your life. We'll ride this truck into town."

THE inside of the truck was brightly lighted and a man uniformed like the driver sat dozing on a camp stool in one corner.

"Who's that goof on the foldin'

chair?" Fazoni demanded.

"He's guarding the cargo," said the Guide, "But don't worry—he won't see us."

"Why's he guardin' it? What is it? All I can see is crates."

"They're full of mink coats," said the Guide idly.

"Minks! How do you know?"

"My dear fellow, I know everything."

"Wow! Could I of used you while I was alive! A truckload of minks wit' one dopey guard! What a pushover!"

"Now stop drooling, Fazoni, and let's get down to business," snapped the Guide, "We must get your life checked off. We're due at the Gardens an hour before the dawn."

"Say, how about them Gardens?" said Fish-eye curiously. "Sounds like a pretty good deal."

"Oh, it's not a bad 'deal,' as you put it," the Guide replied absently, leafing through a notebook, "That is, if your record is good."

"My — uh — record?" said Fazoni nervously.

"Yes. You see, Fish-eye, there are those who sniff the flowers, and those who do the hoeing. Our flowers are very beautiful and they need constant attention."

"C— constant?"

"Twenty-four hours a day. They're terribly delicate. But all that will come later. First, your record . . . ah, here we are. Fazoni, James 'Fish-eye.' H'mmmm . . . Say, you're going to be a busy little bee. I must have you look after my nasturtiums. . . . Let's see, now—on December 13th, 1934, you shot one High Hat Harrigan through his hat—and his head."

"You can't prove that!" Fazoni shouted. "There wasn't no witnesses."

"There was one," said the Guide calmly.

"Who?"

"High Hat Harrigan. He's waiting for you in the Gardens. He's been waiting since December 13th, 1934. He'll be happy to see you—his garden needs a

great deal of work."

"Oh," said Fish-eye, beginning to look sick. "This is some setup to spring on a guy. You got lawyers up there?"

"No lawyers," said the Guide, "Only facts."

"Geez," Fazoni mumbled, "I was sure I had that one figured perfect. Just me and Harrigan, all alone. I was wearin' gloves, and I shot him with his own gun. . . . Wait'll I get that crumb who says 'Dead men tell no tales!' Is he up in them Gardens too?"

"Yes he is, but he won't have time to talk to you. He's far too busy hoeing. . . ." He turned a page. "Next item—in 1937 you formed a dope-running syndicate. . . ."

And so it went. The Guide's little book listed every dodge Fish-eye had ever pulled, and with the dead men he quoted as witnesses, he made the ride back into town a thoroughly miserable one for the crestfallen gangster.

By the time they climbed out of the truck Fazoni was a broken man. "Look," he whined, "Whatta we gotta go to my apartment for? Just gimme my hoe and lemme get started."

"There'll be plenty of time for hoeing, Fish-eye," said the Guide. "You're going to learn something very interesting on this visit to your apartment—now that it's too late."

In the hall outside Fazoni's door a policeman lounged against the wall. "Cops," Fish-eye grumbled. "Snoopin' around to see what they can find, now I'm on the dead list."

The policeman straightened as they approached. He spoke to the Guide. "Hello, lieutenant," he said, "The inspector's inside."

The Guide grinned that crooked grin again. "Thanks, Mulligan," he said.

Fish-eye froze in his tracks. "Hey, wait a minute! He called you lieutenant!" he babbled, his brain buzzing. "How come he can see you?"

"He can see me because I'm here, and he calls me lieutenant because my name's Lieutenant McCawley," said

Lieutenant McCawley.

"But—but that's crazy!" Fazoni yelled. "I'm dead—you're the Garden Guide!"

Mulligan stared. "Wow—I never thought I'd see the great Fish-eye Fazoni crack up!"

"Pitiful case, isn't it, Mulligan?" McCawley smirked. "Come on inside, Napoleon—there's someone here I want you to meet."

Dazed, Fazoni allowed himself to be led into the apartment. A man rose to meet them. It was the elderly, alert-looking filling station attendant. "Well, McCawley?" he said eagerly.

"Got a full confession, inspector," McCawley chortled.

"You don't mean—everything?"

"Down to the last parking ticket. Oh, but where are my manners? Fish-eye, I want you to meet Inspector DiRicci—one of the finest actors I've ever met."

"Oh, come now, McCawley," the inspector beamed, "I just did a bit part. It was you who played the leading role."

FAZONI, who had been looking wildly from one to the other, finally regained his voice. "You got nothin' on me!" he howled, "I deny everything I told him!"

"Save your breath, Fish-eye," said McCawley smugly, "There was a camera in one of those crates in the truck. Remember the bright lights? We made sound movies of the whole thing. The man on the camp stool was a stagehand—the union insisted."

"I hope he didn't louse things up, McCawley," said the inspector anxiously.

"No, he dozed through the whole thing, as we had expected he would."

Fazoni groaned and sank into a chair. "I wish I was dead," he said with feeling.

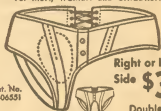
"Well, we must celebrate!" said the inspector, "Drink, McCawley?"

"Don't mind if I do, sir." He settled into Fazoni's deep-cushioned sofa. "Fish-eye, I think you deserve a complete explanation. First of all, your

[Turn page]

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dinner tonight was drugged. We knew you were heading for the border, so we tailed your car, and when the drug had had time to take effect, we forced your driver over to the curb."

"Rockhead!" Fazoni interjected suddenly, "Whatja do with Rockhead?"

"He's well taken care of," McCawley replied, "We have him in the next room. We took him and your car away, dragged up an old wreck and just waited for you to come to. The rest is history, if I may coin a phrase."

"You may, my dear McCawley, you most certainly may," DiRicci gurgled blissfully. "This is the greatest achievement in the history of police work. You deserve the accolades—"

"All right, youse John Laws—reach!" A harsh bark from the doorway of the adjoining room spun their heads around.

"Rockhead!" cried Fazoni in immense, ecstatic relief.

The weapon Rockhead held was a regulation service revolver and ahead of him he pushed a shame-faced patrolman. "Dis John gits up to listen at de door an' I pull a jump on him," he grunted. He shoved the officer roughly toward McCawley and DiRicci. "Come on, Boss, let's beat it!"

"Not till I get that film," Fazoni snarled, "Come on, boys, hand it over!"

"Not a chance, Fish-eye," said DiRicci. "It's being developed at headquarters right now, under heavy guard."

"Wot's dis fillum yer talkin' about, Boss?"

"The works, Rockhead, the whole shootin' match. So just shove the muggs in that closet and let's get outta here!"

The armored limousine was parked outside the house. Rockhead's extra key opened it and they were off, all out for the border.

Eighty-five, read the speedometer. Ninety. A hundred and ten. The great black bullet bellowed defiance as it gulped huge chunks out of the night.

Fish-eye was exhausted from his ordeal. As Rockhead shoved the accelerator steadily deeper into the supercharged well of power, the throbbing roar lulled him into a doze.

When he next came to himself he was lying by the side of a country road. Beside him sat a man in a derby hat who looked much like Lieutenant McCawley. Across the road a smoking wreck held a great oak in crumpled embrace. "What, again, McCawley?" Fish-eye snarled.

"I'm not McCawley," said the man, in McCawley's voice, "I'm your Guide. I'm here to guide you to the Gardens beyond."

"Aw, knock it off, McCawley. That gag's gettin' tired. You're a man just like me."

The man sighed. "What can I do to convince you?"

"Turn yourself into a St. Bernard dog," Fazoni sneered.

So the man turned himself into a St. Bernard dog.

"Well?" said the dog, "Now are you convinced?"

MONKEY TOPS MAN IN ALTITUDE

A CHATTERING little Rhesus monkey holds the altitude record over all human aviators. Recently, in high-altitude experiments carried out by Dr. James P. Henry and his associates of the Aero-Medical Laboratory at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, Ohio, five monkeys were shot aloft in rockets. As computed by scientific instruments, one of these simian space pioneers reached a height of 80 miles above the ground. Riding first-class in a small pressurized capsule in the nose of the rocket, insulated against excessive shock, the monkey returned to Earth little the worse for his involuntary adventure.

In comparison, the altitude record for humans is held by test pilot Bill Bridgeman, who piloted a 40-foot rocket-powered plane 79,494 feet (about 15 miles) above Earth's surface, also setting a speed record of 1,238 miles an hour—twice the velocity of sound. For this dazzling human achievement, the space-cruising Rhesus has only a shrill and derisive monkey laugh!

—Norman B. Wiltsey

The Reader Speaks

(Continued from page 6)

stride. And who knows? It may toughen them up for the H-bomb!

Letters From Our Readers

SIMPLICISSIMUS

by H. Maxwell

Dear Carborundum Mines: Isn't it true that all editorial assignments are made strictly on the basis of how a guy looks when sober and how he babbles when drunk? For example, the seediest looking reporter, the one with the holes in his shoes, last year's suit and the razorblade haircut, is always made racing editor. The guy with the roving eye, flexible hands and flexible stories about women-he-has-made-happy, becomes Mary Moo, the Advice-To-The-Lovelorn-Disher-Outer. And the guy with the Kollege-Kut Klothes, hornrim bifocals and a propensity for completely camouflaging simple ideas with complex Kollege Kut \$1.98 and up rhetoric after his second beer, is always automatically made science fiction editor. Theory: S-F is read only by adolescents and intellectuals, therefore a S-F editor should be half-adolescent and half-intellectual, preferably schizoid.

Now I have no particular beef against adolescents. They are always with us. Every year some group of eleven-year-olds become twelve, develop gland trouble and go nuts. One must simply resign oneself to it with becoming hauteur, austerity, blood sweat and tears. Of course some people never do get over that gland trouble. They make the three big discoveries that every adolescent makes: (1) the importance of "I" (2) Sex (3) the incredible ignorance of adults—and they never do un-discover them.

But intellectuals! On these ptuis I have no mercy. I declare war. They are more irritating than a bunch of radio-active fleas on the un-scratchable end of a dog; they are a putrescent, purulent pox that has infected our palsied old civilization; they are a rancid, odorous collection of four-letter non-dictionary synonyms for an unmentionable epithet. Gr-r-r-r!

By definition, an intellectual is a schmo who appropriates a perfectly simple idea (originated by a non-intellectual) and thereupon proceeds to build a complex mental labyrinth in which he can hide the perfectly simple idea so that nobody else can find it. (If the intellectual can't find it either, he scores BINGO and becomes an overnight genius.) The object of this little game is to construct such a weirdly pseudo-logical labyrinth that any sane person would quickly be left behind, lost, bothered, bewildered and wondering who's balmy. By this cunning device the intellectual proves conclusively that he is smarter than anybody, including of course the fellow who thought up the perfectly simple original idea in the first place.

In ancient days, intellectuals used to be preceded by a man carrying a red lantern and they had to

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wear cowbells that dangled and jangled just below the buttocks to distinguish them from cows who wore same around their necks. Besides, in ancient days idea-twisting wasn't much of an art, so that the intellectual was only a minor menace. But then came science and with it "facts" in the number of *X10000th* power; enough facts so that any half-wit could give the old pretzel treatment to any old concept. As if science wasn't enough, we had to go and deal out mass education which caused intellectuals to increase and multiply as though by spontaneous combustion of the inverse square law. Then came Freud who invented the "fact" that the human mind was a deep dark mystery and gave the intellectuals a platinum-plated license to go around annoying sane people.

Well, I hereby declare that license to be made of imitation tin and counterfeit, null, void, irrelevant, immaterial and dehydrated.

The human mind *isn't* mysterious. It's a simple mechanism, properly used. It can handle only simple concepts, can create complex concepts only by piling simplicity upon simplicity. It is axiomatic that that which seems complex is just not well understood. The expert in any line always says, "It's really very simple, Junior." And it *is* simple. It's Junior's ignorance that's complex. As for science—all the hoopla and folderol about the scientific method is so much moldy, pasteurized, homogenized, odorproof, civilized, science-treated autopack, self-chewing, self-masticating, smelly old limburger.

It is forgotten that science is simply a dynamic philosophy, that its basic philosophy is nothing more than the simple statement of a simple point of view (true of any philosophy). The basic concept of science is to find truth by measurement. Read Isaac Newton. It is forgotten that any philosophy contains built-in limitations, limitations to its basic concept, limitations which it can never surmount.

Newton, a non-intellectual, recognized the limitations of the scientific philosophy. Modern scientists have a bad case of amnesia. It is forgotten that civilizations don't just grow haphazardly, but are shaped by the dynamic philosophies which are dominant within them. Witness—the European civilization shaped by the Christian concept of "brotherhood," the Roman civilization shaped by the concept of "civic duty," the Bolshevik civilization shaped by the Marxian concept of "class warfare."

It is forgotten that during the hey-day of a dynamic philosophy its adherents claim for it supreme truth, the ability to solve all problems and that they always pooch-pooch other dynamic philosophies. It is forgotten that once the built-in limitations of a dynamic philosophy become also built-in to a civilization, that civilization fails.

It is not understood that a new dynamic philosophy is needed. It is even less understood that a good civilization requires not one, but several dynamic philosophies which would tend to keep each other in balance and the civilization sane. "Brotherhood," "civic duty," "truth through measurement"—we need these and much more. We need to throw Freud out of a spaceship and all others who attempt to analyze mental processes by measurement, which is like trying to beat the races by mathematical methods (instead of learning to

talk to the horses, which any fool can see is a method that might work, part of the time anyway).—354 West 56th St., New York 19, N. Y.

In the interests of a dynamic philosophy, suppress that pleasant thought of prescribing a little DDT for friend Maxwell. Who knows—there may be something in what he says. What we are left marveling at is his sheer courage. This lad has probably set a new record for all future TRS addicts to shoot at. Not just in the quantity of his invective—this is a minor achievement—rather in his Freudian-like masochism in offering himself as a target from so many directions at once. Not too squeamish ourselves, we nevertheless shudder at the prospect. Where do you want the body sent?

ANYONE FOR MURDER?

by Richard Harter

Dear Sam: Alas and alack. What has happened to the red blooded virile controversy that enlivened the pages of TRS in yesteryear? Everything is so tame and civilized in comparison. Even Siebel and Gibson have ceased their proverbial snarling. They sound mild and apologetic in comparison with the barbs and missiles of the past. What happened, Sam?

The sound, concussion and confusion of battle are dying down. Where are the great feuds and warfairs of yesteryear? Where is the great religious feud—gone, squelched in its prime. Oh Sherlock, where art thou? There was a boy who knew how to make things lively. Anderson and Snell have long since ended their epic slugfest. Even the personal feuds have gone the way of the dodo. Pvt. Moir, where are you?

Everywhere reigns sanity, peace, order—lifelessness. Did I say lifelessness. No, not yet. Not while Calkins and Bradley, Pace and the unquenchable Rev Moorehead are around. But despite them exudes the odor of civilization and meekness. TRS HAS BEEN TAMED. WE WANT BLOOD.

Who is to blame? You are Samuel, and you alone. Who made the illustrations good enough so that no one would argue over them—you did. Who stopped the religious feud in its prime—you did. Who deliberately published stories that weren't controversial—you did. Quit muttering about Lovers, M & F, Nod and Mother being controversial stories. Where was the controversy; I didn't see it. Half a million fen wrote in to approve but that makes a rather one-sided fight; everybody for and nobody against.

Let's face it Sammy. Not only have you slipped but you have greased your own slide. For that you will have to make recompense. What shall it be? Treacherous ambush or honorable declaration of war?

We could rekindle the religious feud. Where are you Sherlock? That's a good starter but where do we go from there? Too had you no longer publish anything controversial in your magazines; they're no help. Sex? I doubt it. Not if we want to keep the post office disinterested. An item of

interest; people who were not surprised by the male Kinsey report are shocked by the Kinsey report on the human female. I wonder if they know yet that women commit adultery just as often as men. Elementary biological statistic, you know. Then there are general topics. I wish I could think of a really good rip-snortin' subject for a feud. The trouble is that to start a really good fight you've got to shock people. And anything that the PO lets by is not likely to shock anyone. Not these days.

In sheer desperation I am entering the fray myself. I would rather sit back and clap my hands in glee at the prospect of stones being thrown from one glass house to another. One must make sacrifices these days. And Sam, you will be my pall-bearer won't you?

In the hope that I might be able to stir up a fight I have set down certain propositions that I will defend in honorable or dishonorable controversy against all comers. Pistols at thirty paces.

1. Birth control is both pointless and useless for the control of population.
2. Colonization of the solar system is impractical.
3. The race will not be united under one stable government within the next fifty years.
4. Within a hundred years no major democracy will exist.
5. The conclusion that a rocket could not travel at the speed of light is fallacious.

And a nonce. I would like to get ahold of a good copy of the June, 1951 copy of TWS. Or if the lead novel of that issue has been put into book form I would like to get a copy of it.

That's all now; much more next time. Anyone for tennis? Anyone for murder?—*Highmore, So. Dakota.*

Sanity, peace, order, did you say?

FAN DANCER

by John Courtois

Dear Sam: Gathering my courage and wits about me, I recently plunged into what is laughingly known as fandom. I came up with a bad taste in my mouth. A slimier group of misfits has never existed. All fandom suffers from a vast persecution complex, resulting in such actions as . . . OK. You can stop right there, Courtois. If you get any more technical, only Sam will be able to understand you. And you are not writing for him. This is for the masses of slithering creatures who write the kind of letters you've been getting lately.

I'll start over. How is this? Science fiction is the last refuge for psychopaths. Every added American (except for generals and politicians and Lord knows they lack the imagination) has joined the ranks. And I do mean rank! You dare not breathe western style if you wish to remain unscathed. Perhaps I am unique in that I don't consider myself part of the *avant garde* of the New Literature. That is why I am disgusted by the Abominations who cry out with loud and lurid tripwriters, "There is but one literature, Science Fiction, and the fan is its prophet." If there are any Mohammedans reading this, I apologise.

Fen don't judge a mag by the story quality. They

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demand an editor as inane as themselves. Needless to say, this is why Sam is so popular. My main complaint is that the ten consider their silly little clubs and trite fanzines to be more important than science fiction. Fandom is primarily a social designation for one of the smellier segments of mankind. Once upon a time they all read sf. Now they are too busy telling each other how wonderful they are to bother with such a juvenile practice. If they want to come back to sf, welcome them with open arms. If they just want to weep that they are so picked on because Mommy doesn't understand the importance of the dirty letters they write, keep them out of the magazines. Some of us have weak stomachs!

Certain fen will wonder why you printed this letter. It is because you have a great deal of admiration for me. You said yourself that you admired intelligence. Besides, didn't you ask for controversy? If anyone disagrees with me, let them tell me. But I warn you. If I don't like your letter, I'm mean enough to make you pay postage on the bomb I'll send.—318 East Commercial St., Appleton, Wis.

Gathering your wits and courage about you was not enough, boy. You can't come to a struggle like this unarmed. Speaking of psychos you know the story of the lad who came to see a psychiatrist? He was wearing a headpiece of fresh spinach with a strip of bacon tastefully arranged over each ear and a carrot for a bow tie. The psychiatrist flinched a little when he saw him, but being a brave man asked him what he could do for him.

"Doc," said the walking truck patch, "I came to see you about my brother."

The psychiatrist absorbed this, shuddering a little, but asked bravely, "What's wrong with your brother?"

"He thinks he's a chicken," replied the client. "H'm," said the psychiatrist. "This is very serious. He should be put in an institution. You can do that, you know."

"Oh, I know," said the client, "and we would, but we need the eggs!"

EXTREMELY PACIFIC

by John Walston

Dear Mines, Samuel: Ho, ho, hee, hee, hah, hah, chock sputter. Pardon my outburst but I've just finished reading the most silly story. Its "The Inevitable Conflict" and it has the most ridiculous plot. It concerns a future America ruled by women, hah! This woman's government is faced with a military invasion from a world dominant power, Mongolia. Now get this: The women in the American government are pacifists in the extreme. Women pacifists? Now you know why I'm laughing. Well, the Mongolians finally invade America, but are repulsed after the men revolt and take over. Ha!

But, wait a minute, aren't women taking a larger part of power in government every year.

Urp. And the only thing that keeps Russia the leading communist power is the Chinese heavy industry is almost non-existent, but if China had a war production like Russia's her greatly superior reserves of manpower would tip the scales in her favor. What am I laughing about?

To Marion Zimmer Bradley: just wait a couple of generations and there won't be question about birth control. It'll be necessary—that is if there aren't any atomic wars. Even then there won't be a problem.

Sam, of fuzzy head, will the end ever come to the great decline? I've just read that there's no Wonder Annual this year, sob.

The Winter issue of TWS nevertheless has some excellent fiction in it. Keep it up. THE AGILE ALGOLIAN stands head and shoulders over the rest of the stories.—Vashon, Wash.

You'd better stop laughing. The wealth of America is rapidly being concentrated in women's hands and with wealth goes power. Another generation or two and you might just have that little matriarch we're talking about. But as for women being pacifists, I dunno. I've met some pugnacious, not to say bellicose, women in my time. Be funny if the men turned out to be the pacifists. And if that's a plot, you can have it for free.

SEXY SPATS

by Tom Condit

Sam: If a mere male may be permitted to charge into the morass of TRS, I would like to put in my two bits worth on birth control, morals, sex, etc.

Astra: You say young people aren't fit to assume responsibility for the number of children they should have. Trust you wouldn't mind explaining who is? Aside from genetics and economics, there's also a little matter of psychology and basic human rights involved.

Now for morals. This country still hasn't recovered from Victorianism and its silly ideas. By this I don't imply that everyone should sleep with someone different every night, but that it's no one else's business if they do. Sexual relations are a matter of personal agreement between two persons and are a matter of personal taste. To quote another fan, people should learn to distinguish between morals and ethics. A person's morals are no more subject to legal action than his taste in clothing. You can't arrest a man because of his clothing, and some day bright green opera hats and salmon pink-spats may come into fashion, along with mistresses. *Autres temps, autres moeurs.*

The "morals" laws are an affront to personal dignity and privacy, and a man's right to be different is the most important tenet of democracy.—1454 Court Street, Redding, Calif.

We wouldn't say that a man's morals are no one's business but his own. A man's moral behavior, if extreme, could be dangerous to others or could be an affront to others. After all, it

was old Tom Jefferson himself who defined personal liberty as the right to swing your arm—until it contacted someone else's nose. Then it had to be curtailed. But there is a big difference between that kind of curtailment and blue laws. Things change, though. The Romans were more liberal about sex than we, the Victorians much less. Who knows which way we go next?

TO THE PURE

by Joe Keogh

Salutations, Sam: It will have been three months ere this discourse sees print, if it does see print, so I suppose I should ramble on about anything *but* the stories; seeing as by then discussing anything concerning them would be like casually referring to an old Sanskrit adage. But I doubt if one of them will be forgotten so quickly, since I deem a certain sequel deserves proper immortalization between boards even more than its MOTHER.

Ah yes, Sam, you could have struck me down with a weak plot, I'm actually on the fringe of boundless ecstasy! What a lovely swan song for the old bi-monthly TWS! Right now is where you expect me to say that if every ish is as good as the Dec., who cares about an extra month? Fiendish you, baiting us with an issue no true fan could resist! No one can complain when his mouth is full.

But if TWS-bi-monthly had to go, what a nice way to go! Sam, favorite ed, I presume you've heard the one about the Irishman who drowned in a vat of Scotch whiskey—and it took them three weeks to wipe the smile off his face. Well, pretty much the same case (not of whiskey) only we multiply by four for four excellent stories: DAUGHTER (which I predict Dikty will gobble up,) SECOND LANDING (did Will intend this for the now defunct SpS?), THE AGILE ALGOLIAN, and PRIZE SHIP.

To me, science fiction needs plot as its most important part. That is, and I think we all know it to some extent or other, without the necessary details it doesn't give the imagination as big a ride. Take DAUGHTER, which to me was the essence of science fiction. Yet there wasn't much action in it, as all space opera addicts would have us believe is the one vital ingredient to the mix, always using a name brand.

But even in DAUGHTER there was a certain amount of it. I ask you, Sam, how many of us felt the gnawing suspense when the "olfway" was almost through?—And I almost died laughing in my chair when I found out that originally Dizzy Dzanku was *honest!* I've become used to these names authors dream up to make stf realistic, and so thought that in pronouncing Dzanku you left the "D" as mute. Not so, it appears.

Nice cover, too. It rather grows on you, even though it might sicken you at first. Just the opposite with some others. I growled once about TRS being only twelve letters long—this one seems to be seven letters small. I was going to

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comment that with most, they were either boring or nauseating (don't know which is better; at least with the latter you can get it out of your system by throwing a few snidies) (but I wrote this letter after breakfast, so perhaps that's why the jovial mood). Then I thought that if they were that bad and that short, my own effort was either recking or subversive, shrugged my antennae, and went to sleep reading Haphwitz's *Treatise on the Alphabet, Its Idiosyncrasies, and How to Learn It*. (It was hard for him, too, Sam.)
—63 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont.

The way you use the word "plot" makes me suspect you mean "idea" instead. There's a difference; plot being merely the bones of action which you use to bring out the idea or theme. What you were chortling over was Farmer's pioneering in ideas. Which, to repeat a cliché, is all to the good, since science fiction is—or should be—primarily a literature of ideas.

As to your private p.s., Joe, I was not your mysterious benefactor. It wouldn't have been ethical. Sorry. Your name and address are right here in the public prints, however, for all to see.

BOTH SIDES

by Gwen Cunningham

Dear Sam: Many of my letters have failed to see print, which is painful to my pride, but my common sense reveals that it takes a certain genius to write an outstanding letter that discusses in the main, the distinctive aromas of various stories you have printed in TWS.

However, this does not prevent my writing to you when I have something definite to say—in fact to refrain would injure my id or some such part of my ego which at this moment clamors to be heard.

I once tried to criticize the stories you published and found that due to the fine quality of your material I was not able to tear you down constructively. It fact, I ran out of superlatives. So let's just pretend I've praised all the stories as usual and get on to the letter section, which has aroused my madder instincts.

I do not fully subscribe to Marion Z. Bradley's ideas, but I do agree that birth control is being stupidly and blindly woven into the lives of too many people. If a woman is too ill, or if there is disease or insanity, there is nothing better for the world than birth control—and I am a Catholic, so you see I wish to be fair and honest.

But women who can have children are preventing it. And who does the most preventing? Not the morons, or slow-witted, or the worst material, shall we say, of humanity. These women are either too poor to buy contraceptives or too ignorant to use them. So they have the children. Meanwhile the intelligent woman, who has a mind worthy of passing on to a great number of children, says to herself, "I can only afford to send one (or two) children to college, so that is all I

want." Some merely say, "We can't afford to clothe more than one or two."

So the morons are outstripping the intelligent and in a couple of generations it can mean an evil day for humanity. I'm for the woman who has the sense to realize that mankind should not be robbed of future geniuses, which, by the way, I believe we will badly need, from the way the world wags today. Down with M. Sanger!

As for what I got out of the argument about husbands and fidelity, I have to laugh!

When my husband spent a year in Okinawa and a year in China, I began to take stock. I decided that above all I loved my husband and wanted to keep him. So I wrote to him, saying that I knew how things were and that he could rely on me for full and loving understanding. I said that no matter what happened, he'd find me waiting at home, so he needn't feel guilty if he made a little slip now and then.

You know what he answered? Well, I'm a lady so I can't repeat it all. But the finish line said he considered marriage to be sacred and that he blanketly-well wasn't handing me any blanket pardons so I'd better watch my step!

Anyhow, the moral is, to me, that if you're in love—truly in love—you can forgive, and even more, you can understand. Nobody is perfect and where a husband may slip in one way, a woman can have very different, but very horrid faults of her own that the husband can't stand either. I think marriage is give as well as take and I also think that too many people are like kids. "If you don't play my way I won't play with you, so there!" So instead of trying to make it work they dash off to Reno or the local courthouse and quit playing. Sure, some things are hard to take, but that's the whole point. If you don't try to make it work, you're not doing your share and it's not a marriage.

Personally, I'm lucky. I don't deserve the swell guy I have. But I feel like spanking—hard—an emotionally immature woman (or man) who is to quick to throw the stone of accusation and unforgiveness. Even Jesus forgave—are we better than Him?—9120 E. Marginal Way, Seattle, 8, Wash.

This is a valid enough argument, that the more intelligent people are more likely to make use of birth control information and the ignorant more likely to spawn. However we might note in passing that all birth control measures require education and the answer might be to disseminate this education universally so that it can become available to the ignorant instead of, as now, suppressing it so that only those with more brains or money or contacts can have access to it. For as even your letter implies—it isn't that the ignorant want more children, they don't know how to prevent them.

READER'S CHOICE

by Judy LeFever

Dear Sam: I just read Marion Bradley's letter in the Winter TWS and I must say I fully agree

with everything she had to say. It's nice to know that there are people like her around.

I have a few well (?) chosen words to say to you though. What do you mean "blind chance?" and "Who decides that?"

When you get up in the morning it's just "blind chance" whether you'll live through the day or not. And who do you think decides that—or is it old-fashioned to believe in God these days?—3278 Ogden Ave., Ogden, Utah.

P.S. Pretty good mag you've got here.

It is axiomatic, of course, that if you believe God dictates every action of your life, you have no problem. However, there are many people who believe in God just as devoutly, who do not think He dictates every action, large or small, but permits humans to work out their own destinies. Where you have a choice you are to that extent controlling your own future.

And some letters are left. Paul Mittlebuscher, Sweet Springs, Mo. in a cynical moment warns against too-romantic stories, says that females are cold and calculating and are never swept off their feet. Nick W. Kaufman, 74 Carson Ave., Newburgh, N. Y. gurgles happily about DAUGHTER and predicts immortality for Farmer. Gary Labowitz, 7234 Baltimore, Kansas City 14, Mo., liked DAUGHTER even better than MOTHER, wants trimmed edges on all the mags and wants to trade sf mags with all.

Jean Courtois, 318 East Commercial St., Appleton, Wis., is in a belligerent mood, says marriage hadn't better be a ball and chain on her ankle or she'll show 'em. Michael McGowan, 436 Auburn Ave., Pontiac, Mich., seems to like everything, bless him. W. C. Brandt, 1725 N. Seminary, Oakland 1, Calif., liked the stories but was especially pleased with THE STARS ARE CLOSER THAN YOU THINK as he is studying astronomy.

Dick Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon, says all other editors and publishers are giving the reader the cold shoulder and why don't we take him into our confidence and tell him what's what? Wish somebody would tell us! Carol McKinney, 377 East 1st North, Provo, Utah, wants to see Marion Bradley and Sid Sullivan get together so she can watch the sparks. Also announces a new fanmag called DEVIANT. Write her. Ron Ellik, 232 Santa Ana, Long Beach 3, Calif. is unhappy about the quarterly publication. Lou Tabakow, 7419 Plainfield Rd., Deer Park 36, Ohio, announces the 5th Indian Lake sf Convention on May 22 and 23, 1954 at the Hotel Ingalls, Bellefontaine, Ohio. Write directly to the hotel for reservations.

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Introduction by Robert Heinlein
 Preface and Notes by Samuel Mines
 Jacket by Alex Schomburg

Calvin Thos. Beck, Box 497, Hackensack, N. J. sympathizes with the editor's struggles in getting good stories. Has back numbers in SS, TWS and Cap Future to sell. Ray Thompson, 410 So. 4th St., Norfolk, Nebraska prods Marion Bradley by reminding her that if parents haven't had enough conditioning to decide how many children they should have, who has? Glen F. Kinzey, 211 N. 4th St., Okemah, Okla. wants to know where he can get a complete set of the Manning Draco stories. If our old memory holds out, Henry Holt & Co., published them under the title **ONCE UPON A STAR**. Write 'em at 383 Madison Ave., New York. John G. Fletcher, 220 East Glenside Ave., Glenside, Pa. wants back issues of TWS, wants to know who did the illo for **HEINKLE** (Poulton—Ed) and wants to fool Sid Sullivan by not arguing with her. H'mm? Joe Springard, S/sgt, 3058 3751st Student Sqdn, Bks. 865, Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, picked up his first copy of TWS in 2½ years, since Korea, and was cheered by the improvement.

J. Goldfrank, 1115 Fulton St., Woodmere, N. Y. has been trying to get a set of Brunswick's album 58962 **IMPRESSIONS FROM OUTER SPACE**. Probably wasn't released then, but is now—or try Brunswick direct. And Sam Moskowitz announces that he is teaching a college course in stf writing at City College with Robert Frazier. And that's it till next time.

—The Editor

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 8, 1903, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF Thrilling Wonder Stories, published quarterly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1953. 1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Standard Magazine, Inc., 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y. Editor, Samuel Mines, 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y. Managing editor, None. Business manager, Harry Slater, 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y. 2. The owner is: Standard Magazines, Inc., 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y., N. L. Pines, 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Harry Slater, business manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1953. Eugene Wechsler, Notary Public. (My commission expires March 30, 1954)

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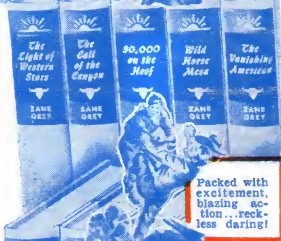
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